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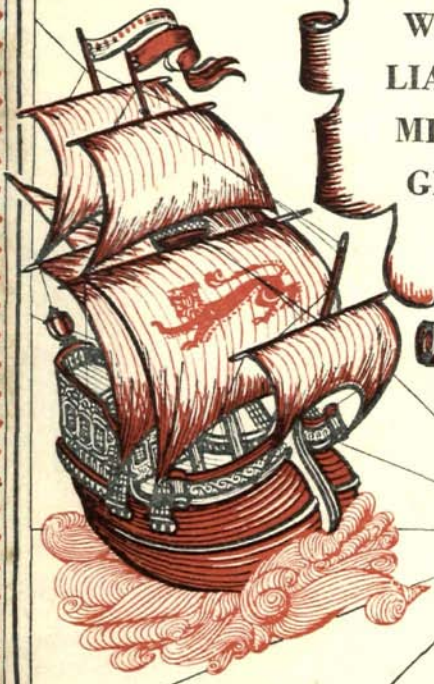

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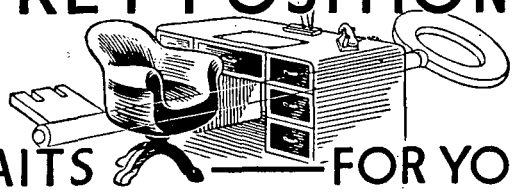

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ARGOSY

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Holy Night

HOLY thorn that blooms
In the cold
Winter's night.

Holy beasts that kneel
In the leaping
Candlelight.

Holy star that shines
On the roof tree
Glimmering.

Holy song that sounds
That the angels sing.

Holy men of heart
Prince and shepherd offering
Tribute to the King.

Holy maid that weeps
Tending alone
Holy babe that sleeps
On the cold stone.

Holy babe, sleeping there, who dost not despise
Homage of the humble, worship of the wise,
Riches of Balthasar, heart's love of the poor,
And neither ass nor wise man turnest from Thy door;
Grant that we too, Lord, kneeling may receive
Joy of Thy coming this Christmas Eve.

QUINTIN HOGG

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CAUTIOUS CAVALIER

Robin was young—and life's problems still seemed easy

by HUGH WALPOLE

ROBIN HERRIES, when a very young man, paid his first visit to the South of England. On a wintry day in the northern part of Glebeshire snow began to fall, to his astonishment, for he had understood that in Devonshire, Glebeshire and Cornwall snow was a great rarity, even in the extreme of winter.

It was falling now with great thickness. He dismounted from his horse and studied the drawn map that he had purchased in London. This was a rough map in red and black, with dolphins sporting in the sea, and a fine barque in full sail on the horizon.

Nevertheless, it was excellent in its detail and he repeated to himself with pleasure the names—Rasselas, Pelynt Cross, Treddon Cove, St. Mary Moor. Where was he now? He looked over the bare, bleak landscape, felt the snow stir coldly on his cheek, and then, pushing it from his eyes, saw most unexpectedly, quite close to him, a little grey church.

He stared hard lest it should be some hallucination, for he had been riding along a straight road for a considerable while, looking in front of him, and had seen nothing at all. There it was. There could be no question—small, sturdy, with a bell-tower, and, close beside it, a grey donkey tethered to a stone wall.

He looked again; he must be near Garth-in-Roselands. Yes, and here, on the map, was the church—St. Michael and the Angels. That path to the right must lead to the village of Garth, and so beyond it down to Rasselas and the sea.

He would take shelter in the church for a while, until this storm should be over. He walked across to it, leading his horse, found the door open and entered. Inside, on one of the benches, with a little table at his side, was seated a short, square-set priest, who was painting on a board. Robin had tied his horse to the wall near to the donkey and now he walked up to the priest.

"Forgive me for my intrusion," he said, "but it is snowing and I thought I might shelter here until the snow was over."

The priest looked up at him smiling. He had the merriest face, brown and wrinkled, with an ugly, humorous mouth and soft

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grey eyes. Catholic priests now, at this time in Elizabeth's reign, were rare: the most of them had been robbed, disbanded, turned out into the world for ruin and corruption.

Robin looked over the priest's shoulder and gave a little cry: "How beautiful!" he said.

Praise is pleasant from anybody, and here was an elegant gentleman, in black and silver, little more than a boy, who very certainly meant what he said. The priest was delighted.

He was certainly a master artist. The painting was for a window. The colours were broken into little squares and oblongs and were exceedingly brilliant. The scene was of a meadow in spring, thick with hawthorn blossom, and on the slope of the field a stout, elderly monk was kneeling. Near to him, another monk was standing, his hand on the rough neck of a patient donkey. Robin saw at once that this monk was the little man at his side and that the donkey was the one that he had seen near the church.

"There is to be a window," the priest explained, "in memory of our Abbot—Abbot Anastasius—who was a very good and worthy man. Our monastery of course is dissolved, but some of us yet remain there although it is in ruin. We have permission. Yes, we are still living in our monastery at Royle Parden, two miles from here, by permission of the Queen, because we are Franciscans and have done no evil and are not concerned with any policies. I am the painter of this Group of our Order. That is Abbot Anastasius," he said, pointing to the picture, "and here am I, and here is my donkey, Margaret. For they wished that there should be some other figures, and why not myself, who loved the Abbot as a son loves his father."

"And you make the windows in the monastery?"

"We are famous for our stained glass—such reds and purples and greens as ours are not to be found anywhere in England."

Robin marvelled at the painting for the brilliance of its colouring—the green of the meadow, the snowy white of the hawthorn, the blue of the sky and, round the base, in purple lettering, the name of the Abbot and the date of his death.

He felt at once a warm kinship with the priest. Religion had been always of deep interest to him: he was unlike his big brother, Nicholas, who cared for none of those things. He sat down beside the priest, who told him that his name was Brother Andrew, and before he knew it, Robin was telling him all about himself.

He was by nature reticent and reserved. He cared greatly for reading. He loved his home in the country, Mallory Court, where the pleached hedges were so warm, the flowers so fragrant, the splash of the fountain so musical. The three people he loved most in the world were his father and mother and his brother Nicholas.

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His brother was a giant, the strongest man in England, the best, the bravest, the noblest hearted.

Himself, he thought that he would never marry. Nor would he be a courtier. His friend, Philip Sidney, urged him to come to court, but he could never be alone there. He liked better than anything else to be alone, to ride, as he had been doing during these last days, by himself through the English country. He loved England so much, but there were many things wrong. He had passed groups of rioting disbanded soldiers, and wandering monks. He had seen rotting corpses hanging at the cross-roads, and in many places the people had not enough to eat. Why, if God were all-powerful, did He allow such things?

A very old question, Brother Andrew replied, and, when he himself was young, he had experienced a dreadful time when he had gone far from God and lived evilly with women, and slept in the ditches, a drunken man. Then, one night, as he was sleeping in such a ditch, the Lord Christ had appeared to him in a dream and had called to him to rise and eat and drink with Him at the side of the road. He had heard a voice calling to him out of the sky and the voice had said to him:

"Andrew! Andrew! I have blessed thee and given thee the power to be thy own judge and act of thy own free will! And, because I have done thee this favour, when I might have made thee a slave to *My* will, thou hast disgracefully used Me and thyself also. Arise and be worthy of thy own self-command."

And so he had risen from the ditch and walked under the moon singing, and come to his right mind.

Brother Andrew told all this as though it were as truly a fact as the picture he was painting, so that Robin had to believe him.

It was plain that Brother Andrew, once he had started, was very ready to talk, and he continued, painting all the while, but telling Robin everything about his life. How none of them had any possessions in the world.

"And what about your donkey?" Robin asked.

Brother Andrew grinned like a naughty boy caught in apple-stealing. Yes, the donkey, Margaret, was his and his alone. She loved him and would be obedient to no one else, but stuck her feet in the ground and showed her teeth, if anyone else tried to ride her. He had prayed to God about Margaret and asked that it might not be reckoned a fault in him that he loved her so dearly.

After the death of the Abbot and the dissolution of their monastery, he had been very lonely and had prayed that he might be given something or someone especial to love; and the very next morning a man had brought Margaret to the monastery, saying that he wished to sell her; and Brother Andrew had some

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pence for a barrel of apples that he had sold, and he had bought her. The man said that, in a little white circle on the underpart of her belly, the letters M.M. were marked, that her name was Margaret, and that she was the most human donkey in the whole world. This she had proved to be, and that was why he would place her in the window, a thing that would be a pleasure to the Abbot, who had been a very understanding man and undoubtedly was, in Paradise, an understanding Saint.

It was now approaching the middle of the day, and Andrew asked Robin Herries whether he would eat with him, which Robin said he would be very glad to do.

When they went outside the church, Robin could not restrain a cry, for the snow had ceased to fall, the sun was shining, and the whole world, so far as the eye could see, was a white, shining crystal, the sun bathing the field of snow as though it were a lake. Where the ground rose towards the horizon, a rich purple shadow lay deep in the snow and small birds flew lazily in the blue sky.

The air was so fresh that you might say it had never been air before: it seemed, in its biting cold-warm pungency, to have the scent of the hawthorn in Brother Andrew's picture.

Beside the wall, her rough, shaggy coat shining in the sunlight, Margaret stood patiently. You felt that she was aware of the nearness of Robin's horse but would betray no unladylike interest. As soon as she saw Brother Andrew standing in the doorway of the church, she raised her head and, with her mild, patient eyes—eyes that accepted all the roughnesses of the world and turned them to unintentional charities—she stared across the sunny field at him, as much as to say:

"I am happy because the sun is shining and because you are here and because your painting is successful. For all these things, although I am but an ass, I thank God."

She raised her head and brayed. Brother Andrew went across the field and stroked her and tickled her behind the ear.

"And now," he said, "we must eat."

In the little room that might be called the vestry of the church there was a fire burning, and on the fire an iron pot. Into the pot Andrew put many strange things—grass and hedgerow stuff and part of a rabbit, and the small bones of some birds. He stood there, his thick legs spread wide beneath his robe, stirring, and at last he poured it into two wooden bowls, adding some black bread. But first he knelt down and praised God.

It was good and savoury as anything that Robin had ever eaten, and he wondered whether he had ever been so happy in all his life before, sitting there, dipping his bread into the soup, while

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the sun poured in and the snow shone on the hill beyond the window, sparkling with fire and stained with grape-purple shadow.

Brother Andrew went back to his painting and again Robin sat beside him. While he sat there he thought that he, too, might become a Franciscan. Would not such a life settle his problems for him altogether? To have no possessions, to own nothing, to give up everything to God! It was true that Brother Andrew had his donkey, but that was surely a possession that would never give him any trouble!

Robin was, at this time, so young that it still seemed to him possible to solve life's problems very easily. He looked at Andrew's exquisite painting, the loving, leisured way in which he added a little stroke of purple, gave the hawthorn blossom an added touch of rose-white, painted Margaret's tail with an extra twirl of liveliness! So he too could write poems for the glory of God!

Idly looking through the window on his left, he saw three soldiers in armour staring in at them.

"There are three soldiers outside looking at us."

But that did not disturb Brother Andrew.

"Is one of them a stout, red-haired man, with a broken lip?"

"Yes."

"They are soldiers of Sir Warren Trenchard, whose manor is at Garth-in-Roselands. He is a merry heathen gentleman, and does not believe in God. But neither he nor his men will harm us."

"They are making faces at us," Robin said indignantly.

"They tossed Brother Ignatius once in a blanket, and then tried to make him drunk; and, when he would not, they stripped him naked and painted him in red and black colours."

"I thought you said they never harmed you?"

Brother Andrew grinned as he held his round head on one side, looking at his painting. "We did not like Brother Ignatius. Even the Abbot disliked him."

"Oh, I see. . . . They have gone away now."

An hour later the light was failing and Andrew must set off home. He asked Robin to spend the night at the ruined monastery and Robin readily agreed.

They went into the field. The donkey was not there; only Robin's horse.

Andrew gave a cry. He picked up his skirts and ran about the field crying out: "Margaret! Margaret!"

Robin thought that he had never seen so frantic a distress. The shadows were lying now in heavy bands across the snow and it was bitterly cold. Robin caught Andrew by the shoulder.

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"Those soldiers took Margaret."

Andrew nodded his head frantically.

"Yes, yes. . . . They have teased me before about her. They have threatened at other times . . ." His face was puckered up like a baby's. There were tears on his round cheeks.

"Even *one* possession," Robin thought, "can bring a man to misery."

He called out: "I will go to Sir Warren Trenchard's house and bring Margaret back with me."

The moment he had spoken the words he regretted them. He was young enough in any case to hate nothing so much as to make a fool of himself. His elder brother, Nicholas, had been always a giant of physical accomplishment, able for any feat of strength and famous through all the South of England. But Robin had been a scholar, and not so famous a scholar either. Ladies had loved him for his straight, slender legs and his dark eyes, but he was, as yet, virgin of ladies, and, in any case, he loved his little cousin, Sylvia Herries.

His father, his brother, his mother, his cousins, all the friends of Mallory Court, were given to laugh at him, although in friendly fashion, for his shyness. He did not mind that *they* should laugh at him, but he minded very much that others should. He was the poet, the artist in the Herries blood, and was the more reticent because the other half-Herries was material-minded, like his Uncle Henry, and altogether insensitive.

So that now, when he said this to Brother Andrew, he was sorry at once. To go to a house that he did not know and claim a donkey! An incredible folly!

Then, when he saw in Andrew's eyes tears of relief and joy, he was ashamed of his own cowardice.

"Yes, yes! You go! You go!" Brother Andrew cried, clapping his hands and even skipping on the snow. "They will give her to you! If a cast-off priest, whose monastery has not a roof to its head, comes, they mock him for a vagabond. But an elegant London gentleman—that is quite another matter . . . and remember that God is on your side and that Margaret has silver bells to her ears."

So Robin rode off to the manor house in Garth-in-Roselands. He rode swiftly, so that he might have the job finished the quicker. He imagined, to strengthen himself, how his great brother Nicholas would ride in to Sir Warren's courtyard and go forward and demand Margaret; how his size and strength would make them render up the donkey even at the sight of him.

Just outside the village there was a gallows, with three dead men hanging, and a huge black crow sitting on the head of one

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and picking at it. The snow now in the twilight was grey, but, as the sun sank, the sky faded into the green of a water-meadow and a few stars, like diamond buttons on a tunic, sparkled. The hanged men, their heads lazily on one side, swung slightly against the green sky.

The village street was deserted, but there was no question of the manor house, for there were two stone gryphons on stout pillars on either side of the beautiful iron-laced gate, and, beyond the gate, the stone path and the box hedges. The house, shaped like the letter E, was beautiful with its many windows, divided by stone mullions and transoms into small panels, and the glass in small leaded quarries. The house was built mainly of narrow, rich red brick, with timber and plaster assisting. There was the music of a fountain, reminding Robin of Mallory, and suddenly the sky was filled with a multitude of stars " like angels singing," and the snow on the garden lawns was the colour of ivory.

The hall door was open, and Robin, walking forward, found himself in a company of people.

It was a fine hall and the fireplace was its central feature—a superb fireplace, grander than the one at Mallory—with an overmantel of wood, painted and gilt, the paintings being heraldic coats of arms. The firebacks and dogs were also ornamented. On the floor there was straw matting, which at that time was only in the houses of the rich, insanitary rushes being more usual. There were three tables and a cupboard set with gilt and silver plate. All these must be mentioned, for they showed Robin that he was in the house of one of the chief persons in Glebeshire. He saw at once Sir Warren himself, a stout, broad man with a grey, square beard, wearing a fur cloak over a suit of purple and silver.

Standing near the fire were several ladies and gentlemen: there were many dogs, a major-domo with a gilt-headed staff, and servants bearing drinks. Two men played on lutes and one sang. Robin stayed in the doorway until the verse was ended:

' The blushing cheek speaks modest mind ;
The lips, befitting words most kind.
The eye does tempt to love's desire,
And seems to say 'tis Cupid's fire.
Yet all so fair but speak my moan,
Since nought doth say the heart of stone.

Why thus, my love, so kind bespeak
Sweet lip, sweet eye, sweet blushing cheek,
Yet not a heart to save my pain ?

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O Venus! take thy gifts again;
Make not so fair to cause our moan,
Or make a heart that's like our own.'

The music ceased. Sir Warren, laughing, called out something, then turned and saw Robin standing there. He cried out rather fiercely: "And you, sir?"

"I have come," Robin answered bravely, "to fetch a donkey wrongfully stolen by your men."

At the word "donkey" everyone burst out laughing. One very beautiful dark lady, with a plumed hat, did not laugh, but stared at Robin and then gently smiled.

This encouraged Robin, so he stood his ground manfully, his hand on the gold hilt of his poignard. Sir Warren moved a pace towards him and said courteously,

"That is an accusation, sir. . . . My men are not robbers, or only under necessity." He added with irony, "Whose donkey?"

"The donkey of a priest who is painting at the church on the moor."

"You witnessed its stealing?"

"No, I did not. A space earlier I was in the church and saw your men at the window. Afterwards the donkey was gone and the priest said—"

Sir Warren, who was plainly choleric, interrupted.

"Nursery tales. You did not see the animal stolen and yet you come here—"

"I say that it was stolen, and by your men—"

Sir Warren half drew his sword. "Your name?"

"Robin Herries of Mallory Court in—"

"Never mind where. You must account to me for entering my house unasked and before my guests calling my men thieves."

The beautiful lady interrupted:

"But it may be that the donkey is here. We must see. We must all judge."

And they all caught it up, delighted that there should be a game, crying, "The donkey! The donkey! The donkey!"

Trenchard, ashamed perhaps of showing anger in front of them, half turned, "Well, we will discover—"

He turned to the door, and all of them, in a troop, followed laughing, dancing.

There were torches at the door, and, as they moved out into the snowy garden, they were like revellers in their gold and purple and dark, jetty black, the diamonds and the gold sparkling under the torchlight, while the sky, pierced now with cold, clear stars, gave them back their illumination.

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Sir Warren led them round the house-corner to the stables. There, tethered to the door of a stall, refusing the straw that a man offered her, shaking her head indignantly and ringing her bells, was Margaret.

Robin went up to her, but she did not know him, and, nervous already, poor female, at her rape, shot her ears back and showed her teeth.

"She does not know you," Trenchard said sternly.

"She is not my donkey, but the priest's," Robin answered. "And her name is Margaret."

"Margaret! Margaret!" the crowd echoed delightedly.

Trenchard asked the man to whom the donkey belonged and the man said: "Wallis Despard."

"Call him."

Out of the dark of the stable, the stout soldier whom Robin had seen by the church appeared.

"Is this your donkey?" Trenchard asked him.

"Yes, master."

"Whence had you her?"

"Of a seaman in Southampton—last twelve-month."

"This gentleman"—Trenchard pointed disdainfully at Robin—"swears that you stole it this very day from a priest at a church on the moor."

The soldier, seeing that his master, annoyed by the affair, was on his side, answered heartily: "By the Holy Cross, this is my donkey. They will all tell you so, master."

He went on smoothly: "This gentleman is mistaken in the donkey. It is true that I was by the church this day. Will Boden was with me, and we saw a donkey tethered there. But it was not *my* donkey."

"You lie!"

Robin, feeling that all eyes were mockingly upon him, was raging at them.

"Then," Trenchard answered, "if my man lies, you must prove it. He is *my* man and I take the charge on myself. You must prove it or answer to me."

But he could not prove it. That was Margaret, and he and the soldier knew it. But Margaret could not speak and the soldier would not.

He saw disaster coming upon him. He had given them his name. It would be through England that he had behaved like a foolish, impertinent child. He could hear Nicholas's rebuke, see his father's mouth stiffen as he said: "You must learn wisdom, my son. You are not fit yet for the world. . . ." He saw himself fighting a dozen of them: that would be the easiest way out. He

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stared with a frantic, beseeching gaze at Margaret, but that poor beast could not help him.

Then, in that brief instant before his humiliating surrender, he prayed: "Oh God, who art everywhere, who led me this day to the church and showed me in the painting and in the glittering snow how beautiful is Thy handiwork, help me now, not for my sake but for Thy eternal justice."

"Well, sir?" Trenchard said coldly.

Robin saw the soldier's grinning mouth, felt the stillness of their expectancy of his defeat. The answer came. He pointed at the soldier. "If the donkey is his, and he has had her this year past, ask him what are the initials cut under her belly. He should know if she is his."

Trenchard looked at him; then said sternly to the soldier:

"Answer him. What are the initials?"

The soldier shifted his body from foot to foot. He looked about him. He scowled, turned to the donkey, then muttered:

"There *are* no letters. How should I tell?"

"Certainly you must tell," Trenchard answered him. "You groom her, fasten the harness. There are *no* letters?"

"I know of none."

Trenchard turned to Robin. "The initials are—?"

"M.M."

Trenchard, taking a lantern from a hook, went himself to Margaret, lowered the light and examined. Margaret, nervous and disturbed, bit him in the arm.

Andrew and Robin, a happy pair, riding in the starlight to the monastery, considered the matter.

"It proves to me one thing, Brother Andrew," Robin said, "that it is truly better in this life to have *no* possessions—not one single thing. For four hours of this day, Brother Andrew, in your distress, you have forgotten God."

"Nay," said Andrew, "not so. For during all those hours I prayed to God. It proves rather that man is intended by God to love some earthly thing—for only thus can he truly understand what God is."

And he bent forward and tickled Margaret behind the ears. The silver bells tinkled crisply in the frozen air.

* * *

A misanthrope I can understand—
a womanthrope never.

OSCAR WILDE

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IN VINO VERITAS

And tomorrow he will wake up — and remember

by A. A. MILNE

I AM in a terrible predicament, as you will see directly. I don't know what to do . . .

"One of the maxims which I have found most helpful in my career," the Superintendent was saying, "apart, of course, from employing a good press agent, has been the simple one that appearances are not always deceptive. A crime may be committed exactly as it seems to have been committed, and exactly as it was intended to be committed." He helped himself and passed the bottle.

"I don't think I follow you," I said, hoping thus to lead him on.

I am a writer of detective stories. If you have never heard of me, it can only be because you don't read detective stories. I wrote *Murder on the Back Stairs* and *The Mystery of the Twisted Eglantine*, to mention only two of my successes. It was this fact, I think, which first interested Superintendent Frederick Mortimer in me, and, of course, me in him.

He is a big fellow with the face of a Roman Emperor; I am rather the small neat type. We gradually became friends, and so got into the habit of dining together once a month, each in turn being host in his own flat. He liked talking about his cases, and naturally I liked listening. I may say now that *Blood on the Eiderdown* was suggested to me by an experience of his at Crouch End. He also liked putting me right when I made mistakes, as so many of us do, over such technical matters as finger-prints and Scotland Yard procedure.

I had always supposed, for instance, that you could get good finger-prints from butter. This, apparently, is not the case. From buttery fingers on other objects, yes, but not from the pat of butter itself, or, anyhow, not in hot weather. This, of course, was a foolish mistake of mine, as in any case Lady Sybil would not have handled the butter directly in this way, as my detective should have seen. My detective, by the way, is called Sherman Flagg, and is pretty well known by now. Not that this is germane to my present story.

"I don't think I follow you," I said.

"I mean that the simple way of committing a murder is often

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the best way. This doesn't mean that the murderer is a man of simple mind. On the contrary. He is subtle enough to know that the simple solution is too simple to be credible."

This sounded anything but simple, so I said, "Give me an example."

"Well, take the case of the magnum of Tokay which was sent to the Marquis of Hedingham on his lordship's birthday. Have I never told you about it?"

"Never," I said, and I, too, helped myself and passed the bottle.

He filled his glass and considered. "Give me a moment to get it clear," he said. "It was a long time ago." While he closed his eyes, and let the past drift before him, I fetched another bottle.

"Yes," said Mortimer, opening his eyes, "I've got it now."

I leant forward, listening eagerly. This is the story he told me.

The first we heard of it at the Yard (said Mortimer) was a brief announcement over the telephone that the Marquis of Hedingham's butler had died suddenly at his lordship's town house in Brook Street, and that poison was suspected. This was at 7 o'clock. We went round at once. Inspector Totman had been put in charge of the case; I was a young Detective Sergeant at the time, and I generally worked under Totman. He was a brisk, military sort of fellow, with a little prickly ginger moustache, good at his job, in a showy, orthodox way, but he had no imagination, and he was thinking all the time of what Inspector Totman would get out of it.

Quite frankly I didn't like him. Outwardly we kept friendly, for it doesn't do to quarrel with one's superiors; indeed, he was vain enough to think that I had a great admiration for him; but I knew that he was just using me for his own advantage, and I had a shrewd suspicion that I should have been promoted before this, if he hadn't wanted to keep me under him so that he could profit by my brains.

We found the butler in his pantry, stretched out on the floor. An open bottle of Tokay, a broken wine-glass with the dregs of the liquid still in it, the medical evidence of poisoning, all helped to build up the story for us. The wine had arrived about an hour before, with the card of Sir William Kelso attached to it. On the card was a typewritten message, saying, "Bless you, Tommy, and here's something to celebrate it with." Apparently it was his lordship's birthday, and he was having a small family party for the occasion, of about six people.

Sir William Kelso, I should explain, was his oldest friend and a relation by marriage, Lord Hedingham having married his sister; in fact, he was to have been one of the party present that evening. He was a bachelor, about fifty, and a devoted uncle to his nephew and nieces.

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Well, the butler had brought up the bottle and the card to his lordship—this was about 6 o'clock; and Lord Hedingham, as he told us, had taken the card, said something like, "Good old Bill, we'll have that tonight, Perkins," and Perkins had said, "Very good, my lord," and gone out again with the bottle, and the card had been left lying on the table.

Afterwards, there could be little doubt what had happened. Perkins had opened the bottle with the intention of decanting it, but had been unable to resist the temptation to sample it first. I suspect that in his time he had sampled most of his lordship's wine, but had never before come across a Tokay of such richness. So he had poured out a full glass, drunk it, and died almost immediately.

"Good Heavens!" I interrupted. "But how providential—I mean, of course, for Lord Hedingham and the others."

"Exactly," said the Superintendent.

The contents of the bottle were analysed (he went on) and found to contain a more than fatal dose of prussic acid. Prussic acid isn't a difficult thing to get hold of, so that didn't help much. Of course we did all the routine things, and I went with Roberts, a nice young fellow who often worked with us, round all the chemists' shops in the neighbourhood, and Totman examined everybody from Sir William and Lord Hedingham downwards, and Roberts and I took the bottle round to all the well-known wine-merchants, and at the end of a week all we could say was this:

(1) The murderer had a motive for murdering Lord Hedingham; or, possibly, somebody at his party; or, possibly, the whole party. In accordance, we learnt, with the usual custom, his lordship would be the first to taste the wine. A sip would not be fatal, and in a wine of such richness the taste might not be noticeable; so that the whole party would then presumably drink his lordship's health. He would raise his glass to them, and then they would all take the poison, and be affected according to how deeply they drank.

On the other hand, his lordship might take a good deal more than a sip in the first place, and so be the only one to suffer. My deduction from this was that the motive was revenge rather than gain. The criminal would revenge himself on Lord Hedingham, if his lordship or *any* of his family were seriously poisoned; he could only profit if *definite* people were definitely *killed*. It took a little time to get Totman to see this, but he did eventually agree.

(2) The murderer had been able to obtain one of Sir William Kelso's cards, and knew that John Richard Mervyn Plantaganet Carlow, 10th Marquis of Hedingham, was called "Tommy" by his intimates. Totman deduced from this that he was therefore one of the Hedingham-Kelso circle of relations and friends; I disputed this. I pointed out: (*a*) that it was rather to strangers than to

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intimate friends that cards were presented; except in the case of formal calls, when they were left in a bowl or tray in the hall, and anybody could steal one; (*b*) that the fact that Lord Hedingham was called Tommy must have appeared in Society papers and be known to many people; and, most convincing of all, (*c*) that the murderer did *not* know that Sir William Kelso was to be in the party that night. For obviously some reference would have been made to the gift, either on his arrival or when the wine was served; whereupon he would have disclaimed any knowledge of it, and the bottle would immediately have been suspected. As it was, of course, Perkins had drunk from it before Sir William's arrival. Now both Sir William and Lord Hedingham assured us that they *always* dined together on each other's birthday, and they were convinced that any personal friend would have been aware of the fact. I made Totman question them about this, and he then came round to my opinion.

(3) There was nothing to prove that the wine in the bottle corresponded to the label; and wine experts were naturally reluctant to taste it for us. All they could say from the smell was that it was a Tokay of sorts. This, of course, made it more difficult for us. In fact, I may say that neither from the purchase of the wine nor the nature of the poison did we get any clue.

We had, then, the following picture of the murderer. He had a cause for grievance, legitimate or fancied, against Lord Hedingham, and did not scruple to take the most terrible revenge. He knew that Sir William Kelso was a friend of his lordship's and called him Tommy, and that he might reasonably give him a bottle of wine on his birthday. He did *not* know that Sir William would be dining there that night; that is to say, *even as late as 6 o'clock that evening, he did not know.* He was not likely, therefore, to be anyone at present employed or living in Lord Hedingham's house. Finally, he had had an opportunity, for what this was worth, to get hold of a card of Sir William's.

As it happened, there *was* somebody who fitted completely into this picture. It was a fellow called—wait a bit, Merrivale, Medley—oh well, it doesn't matter. Merton, that was it. He had been his lordship's valet for six months, had been suspected of stealing, and dismissed without a character. Just the man we wanted.

So for a fortnight we searched for Merton. And then, when at last we got on to him, we discovered that he had the most complete *alibi* imaginable. (*The Superintendent held up his hand, and it came into my mind that he must have stopped the traffic as a young man with just that gesture.*) Yes, I know what you're going to say, what you detective-story writers always say—the better an *alibi*, the worse it is. Well, sometimes, I admit; but not in this case. For Merton was in gaol, under another name, and he had been inside for the last two

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months. And what do you think he was suspected of, and now waiting trial for? Oh well, of course you guess, I've as good as told you. He was on a charge of murder—murder, mark you, by poison.

"Good Heavens," I interjected. I seized the opportunity to refill my friend's glass. He said, "Exactly," and took a long drink. I thought fancifully that he was drinking to drown that terrible disappointment of so many years ago.

You can imagine (he went on) what a shock this was to us. You see, a certain sort of murder had been committed; we had deduced that it was done by a certain man without knowing whether he was in the least capable of such a crime; and now, having proved to the hilt that he was capable of it, we had simultaneously proved that he didn't do it. We had proved ourselves right—and our case mud.

I said to Totman, "Let's take a couple of days off, and each of us think it out, and then pool our ideas and start afresh."

Totman frisked up his little moustache, and laughed in his conceited way.

"You don't think I'm going to admit myself wrong, do you, when I've just proved I'm right?" Totman saying "I", when he had got everything from me! "Merton's my man. He'd got the bottle ready and somebody else delivered it for him. That's all. He had to wait for the birthday, you see, and when he found himself in prison, his wife or somebody—"

"—took round the bottle, all nicely labelled 'Poison; not to be delivered till Christmas Day'." I had to say it, I was so annoyed.

"Don't be more of a damned fool than you can help," he shouted, "and don't be insolent, or you'll get into trouble."

I apologized humbly, and told him how much I liked working with him. He forgave me—and we were friends again. He patted me on the shoulder.

"You take a day off," he said kindly, "you've been working too hard. Take a bus into the country and make up a good story for me; the story of that bottle, and how it came from Merton's lodging to Brook Street, and who took it and why. I admit I don't see it at present, but that's the bottle, you can bet your life. I'm going down to Leatherhead. Report here on Friday morning, and we'll see what we've got. My birthday as it happens, and I feel I'm going to be lucky."

Leatherhead was where this old woman had been poisoned. That was the third time in a week he'd told me when his entirely misconceived birthday was. He was like that.

I took a bus to Hampstead Heath. I walked round the Pond twenty times. And each time Totman's theory seemed sillier than the last time. And each time I felt more and more strongly that we were

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being *forced* into an entirely artificial interpretation of things. It sounds fantastic, I know, but I could almost feel the murderer behind us, pushing us along the way he wanted us to go.

I sat down on a seat, and I filled a pipe and I said, "Right! The murderer's a man who wanted me to believe all that I have believed. When I've told myself that the murderer intended to do so-and-so, he intended me to believe that, and therefore he didn't do so-and-so. When I've told myself that the murderer wanted to mislead me, he wanted me to think he wanted to mislead me, which meant that the truth was exactly as it seemed to be. Now then, begin again, take things as they are, and don't be too clever. Because the murderer expects you to be clever, and wants you to be clever, and from now on you aren't going to take your orders from *him*."

And, of course, the first thing which leaped to my mind was that the murderer *meant* to murder the butler!

It seemed incredible now that we could ever have missed it. Didn't every butler sample his master's wines? Why, it was an absolute certainty that Perkins would be the first victim of a poisoned bottle of a very special vintage. What butler could resist pouring himself out a glass as he decanted it?

Wait, though. Mustn't be in a hurry. Two objections. One: Perkins might be the one butler in a thousand who wasn't a wine-sampler. Two: Even if he were like any other butler, he might be out of sorts on that particular evening, and have put by a glass to drink later. Wouldn't it be much too risky for a murderer who only wanted to destroy Perkins, and had no grudge against Lord Hedingham's family, to depend so absolutely on the butler drinking first?

For a little while this held me up, but not for long. Suddenly I saw the complete solution.

It would *not* be risky if (*a*) the murderer had certain knowledge of the butler's habits; and (*b*) could, if necessary, at the last moment, prevent the family from drinking. In other words, if he were an intimate of the family, were himself present at the party, and without bringing suspicion on himself, could bring the wine under suspicion.

In other words, and only, and finally, and definitely—if he were Sir William Kelso. For Sir William was the only man in the world who could say, "Don't drink this wine. I'm supposed to have sent it to you, and I didn't, so that proves it's a fake." The *only* man.

Why hadn't we suspected him from the beginning? One reason, of course, was that we had supposed the intended victim to be one of the Hedingham family, and of Sir William's devotion to his sister, brother-in-law, nephew, and nieces, there was never any doubt.

But the chief reason was our assumption that the last thing a murderer would do would be to give himself away by sending his

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own card round with the poisoned bottle. "The *last* thing a murderer would do"—and therefore the *first* thing a really clever murderer would do. For it couldn't be explained as "the one mistake which every murderer makes"; he couldn't send his own card accidentally. "Impossible," we said, "that a murderer should do it deliberately!" But the correct answer was, "Impossible that we should not be deceived if it were done deliberately"—and therefore brilliantly clever.

To make my case complete to myself, for I had little hope as yet of converting Totman, I had to establish a motive. Why should Sir William want to murder Perkins?

I gave myself the pleasure of having tea that afternoon with Lord Hedingham's cook-housekeeper. We had caught each other's eye on other occasions when I had been at the house, and—well, I suppose I can say it now—I had a way with the women in those days. When I left, I knew two things. Perkins had been generally unpopular, not only downstairs, but upstairs; "it was a wonder how they put up with him." And her ladyship had been "a different woman lately."

"How different?" I asked.

"So much younger, if you know what I mean, Sergeant Mortimer. Almost like a girl again, bless her heart."

I did know. And that was that. Blackmail.

What was I to do? What did my evidence amount to? Nothing. It was all corroborative evidence. If Kelso had done one suspicious thing, or left one real clue, then the story I had made up would have convinced any jury. As it was, in the eyes of a jury he had done one completely unsuspicious thing, and left one real clue to his innocence—his visiting-card. Totman would just laugh at me.

I disliked the thought of being laughed at by Totman. I wondered how I could get the laugh on him. I took a bus to Baker Street, and walked into Regent's Park, not minding where I was going, but just thinking. And then, as I got opposite Hanover Terrace, who should I see but young Roberts.

"Hallo, young fellow, what have *you* been up to?"

"Hallo, Sarge," he grinned. "Been calling on my old schoolchum, Sir Woppity Wotsit—or rather, his valet. Tottie thought he might have known Merton. As one valet to another, so to speak."

"Is Inspector Totman back?" I asked.

Roberts stood to attention, and said, "No, Sergeant Mortimer, Inspector Totman is not expected to return from Leatherhead, Surrey, until a late hour tonight."

You couldn't be angry with the boy. At least I couldn't. He had no respect for anybody, but he was a good lad. And he had an eye like a hawk. Saw everything and forgot none of it.

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"I suppose by Sir Woppity Wotsit you mean Sir William Kelso?" I said. "I didn't know he lived up this way."

Roberts pointed across the road. "Observe the august mansion."

I had a sudden crazy idea.

"Well, now you're going back there," I said. "I'm going to call on Sir William, and I want you handy. Would they let you in at the basement again, or are they sick of you?"

"Sarge, they just love me."

We say at the Yard, "Once a murderer, always a murderer." Perhaps that was why I had an absurd feeling that I should like young Roberts within call. Because I was going to tell Sir William Kelso what I'd been thinking about by the Pond. I'd only seen him once, but he gave me the idea of being the sort of man who wouldn't mind killing, but didn't like lying. I thought he would give himself away . . . and then—well, there might be a rough-house, and young Roberts would be useful.

As we walked in at the gate together, I looked in my pocket-book for a card. Luckily I had one left, though it wasn't very clean. Roberts, who never missed anything, said, "Personally I always use blotting-paper," and went on whistling. If I hadn't known him, I shouldn't have known what he was talking about. I said, "Oh, do you?" and rang the bell. I gave the maid my card, and asked if Sir William could see me, and at the same time Roberts gave her a wink, and indicated the back door. She nodded to him, and asked me to come in. Roberts went down and waited for her at the basement. I felt safer.

Sir William was a big man, as big as I was. But of course a lot older. He said, "Well, Sergeant, what can I do for you?" twiddling my card in his fingers. He seemed quite friendly about it. "Sit down, won't you?"

I said, "I think I'll stand, Sir William. I wanted just to ask you one question if I might." Yes, I know I was crazy, but somehow I felt kind of inspired.

"By all means," he said, obviously not much interested.

"When did you first discover that Perkins was blackmailing Lady Hedingham?"

He was standing in front of his big desk, and I was opposite to him. He stopped fiddling with my card, and became absolutely still; and there was a silence so complete that I could feel it in every nerve of my body. I kept my eyes on his, you may be sure. We stood there, I don't know how long.

"Is that the only question?" he asked. What frightened me was that his voice was just the same as before. Ordinary.

"Well, just one more. Have you a Corona typewriter in your

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house ? " You see, we knew that a Corona had been used, but there was nothing distinctive about it, and it might have been any one in a thousand. Just corroborative evidence again, that's all. But it told him that I knew.

He gave a long sigh, tossed the card into the waste-paper basket, and walked to the window. He stood there with his back to me, looking out but seeing nothing. Thinking. He must have stood there for a couple of minutes. Then he turned round, and to my amazement he had a friendly smile on his face. " I think we'd both better sit down," he said. We did.

" There is a Corona in the house which I sometimes use," he began. " I dare say you use one, too."

" I do."

" And so do thousands of other people—including, it may be, the murderer you are looking for."

" Thousands of people including the murderer," I agreed.

He noticed the difference, and smiled. " People " I had said, not " other people." And I didn't say I was looking for him. Because I had found him.

" So much for that. There is nothing in the actual wording of the typed message to which you would call my attention ? "

" No. Except that it was exactly right."

" Oh, my dear fellow, anyone could have got it right. A simple birthday greeting."

" Anyone in your own class, Sir William, who knew you both. But that's all. It's Inspector Totman's birthday tomorrow—" (" As he keeps telling us, damn him," I added to myself.) " If I sent him a bottle of whisky, young Roberts—that's the constable who's in on this case, you may have seen him about, he's waiting for me now down below "—I thought this was rather a neat way of getting that in—" Roberts could make a guess at what I'd say, and so could anybody at the Yard who knows us both, and they wouldn't be far wrong. But *you* couldn't, Sir William."

He looked at me. He couldn't take his eyes off me. I wondered what he was thinking. At last he said :

" A long life and all the best, with the admiring good wishes of—How's that ? "

It was devilish. First that he had really been thinking it out, when he had so much else to think about, and then that he'd got it so right. That " admiring " ; which meant that he'd studied Totman just as he was studying me, and knew how I'd play up to him.

" You see," he smiled, " it isn't really difficult. And the fact that my card was used is in itself convincing evidence of my innocence, don't you think ? "

" To a jury perhaps," I said, " but not to me."

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"I wish I could convince *you*," he murmured to himself. "Well, what are you doing about it?"

"I shall, of course, put my reconstruction of the case in front of Inspector Totman tomorrow."

"Ah! A nice birthday surprise for him. And, knowing your Totman, what do you think he will do?"

He had me there, and he knew it.

"I think *you* know him too, Sir," I said.

"I do," he smiled.

"And me, I dare say, and anybody else you meet. Quick as lightning. But even ordinary men like me have a sort of sudden understanding of people sometimes. As I've got of you, Sir. And I've a sort of feeling that, if ever we get you into a witness-box, and you've taken the oath, you won't find perjury so much to your liking as murder. Or what the Law calls murder."

"But *you* don't?" he said quickly.

"I think," I said, "that there are a lot of people who ought to be killed. But I'm a policeman, and what I think isn't evidence. You killed Perkins, didn't you?"

He nodded; and said, almost with a grin at me, "A nervous affection of the head, if you put it in evidence. I could get a specialist to swear to it."

My God, he was a good sort of man. I was really sorry when they found him next day on the Underground. Or what was left of him. And yet what else could he do?

I was furious with Fred Mortimer. That was no way to end a story. Suddenly, like that, as if he were tired of it. I told him so.

"My dear Cyril," he said, "it isn't the end. We're just coming to the exciting part. Now listen. On the Friday morning, before we heard of Sir William's death, I went in to report to Inspector Totman. He wasn't there. Nobody knew where he was. They rang up his block of flats. When the porter got into his flat, he found Totman's body. Poisoned."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"You may say so. There he was, and on the table was a newly opened bottle of whisky, and by the side of it was a visiting-card. And whose card do you think it was? *Mine!* And what do you think it said? A long life and all the best with the admiring good wishes of—*me*! Lucky for me I had had young Roberts with me. Lucky for me he had this genius for noticing and remembering. Lucky for me he could swear to the exact shape of the smudge of ink on that card. And I might add, lucky for me that they believed me when I told them word for word what had been said at my interview with Sir William, as I have just told you.

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"I was reprimanded, of course, for exceeding my duty, as I most certainly had, but that was only official. Unofficially they were very pleased with me. We couldn't prove anything, and Sir William's death had looked as accidental as anything could, so we just had to leave it. But a month later I was promoted to Inspector."

He filled his glass and drank, while I turned over his extraordinary story in my mind.

"The theory," I said, polishing my pince-nez thoughtfully, "was, I suppose, this. Sir William sent the poisoned whisky, not so much to get rid of Totman, from whom he had little to fear, as to discredit you by bringing you under suspicion, and entirely to discredit your own theory of the other murder?"

"Exactly."

"And then, at the last moment, he realized that he couldn't go on with it, or the weight of his crimes became suddenly too much for him, or—"

"Something of the sort. Nobody ever knew, of course."

I looked across the table with sudden excitement; almost with awe. "Do you remember what he said to you?" I asked, giving the words their full meaning as I slowly quoted them. 'The fact that my card was used is convincing evidence of my innocence.' And you said, 'Not to me.' And he said, 'I wish I could convince you.' *And that was how he did it!* The fact that your card was used *was* convincing evidence of your innocence!"

"With the other things. The proof that he was in possession of the particular card of mine which was used, and the certainty that he had committed the other murder. Once a poisoner, always a poisoner."

"True . . . yes . . . Well, thanks very much for the story, Fred. All the same, you know," I said, shaking my head at him, "it doesn't altogether prove what you set out to prove."

"What was that?"

"That the simple explanation is generally the true one. In the case of Perkins, yes. But not in the case of Totman."

"Sorry, I don't follow."

"My dear fellow," I said, putting up a finger to emphasize my point, for he seemed a little hazy with the wine suddenly; "the *simple* explanation of Totman's death—surely?—would have been that *you* had sent him the poisoned whisky."

Superintendent Mortimer looked a little surprised.

"But I did," he said.

So now you see my terrible predicament. I could hardly listen as he went on dreamily: "I never liked Totman, and he stood in my way; but I hadn't seriously thought of getting rid of him, until

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I got that card into my hands again. As I told you, he dropped it into the basket, and turned to the window, and I thought, 'Damn it, *you* can afford to chuck about visiting-cards, but I can't, and it's the only one I've got left, and if you don't want it, I do.' So I bent down very naturally to do up my boot-lace, and felt in the basket behind me, because of course it was rather an undignified thing to do, and I didn't want to be seen; and it was just as I was putting it into my pocket that I saw that ink-smudge again, and I remembered that Roberts had seen it. And in a flash the whole plan came to me; simple; fool-proof. And from that moment everything I said to him was in preparation of it.

"Of course we were quite alone, but you never know who might be listening, and besides"—he twiddled the stem of his empty wine-glass—"p'r'aps I'm like Sir William, rather tell the truth than not, and it *was* true, all of it, as I told the Super, how Sir William came to know about Totman's birthday, and knew that those were the very words I should have used. Made it very convincing, me just repeating to the Super what had really been said. Don't think I wanted to put anything on to Sir William that wasn't his. I liked him. But he as good as told me he wasn't going to wait for what was coming to him, and he'd done one murder anyway. That was why I slipped down with the bottle that evening, and left it outside Totman's flat. Didn't dare wait till the morning, in case Sir William closed his account that night."

He stood up and stretched himself. "Ah, well, it was a long time ago. Goodbye, old man, I must be off. Thanks for a grand dinner. Don't forget, you're dining with *me* next month. I've got a new cocktail for you. You'll like it." He swaggered out leaving me to my thoughts.

"Once a murderer, always a murderer . . ." And tomorrow he will wake up and remember what he has told me! And I shall be the only person in the world who knows his secret! . . .

Perhaps he won't remember. Perhaps he was drunk . . .

In vino veritas. Wasn't it the younger Pliny who said that? A profound observation. Truth in the bottle . . .

"Once a poisoner, always a poisoner . . ."

"I've got a new cocktail for you. You'll like it."

Yes, but—shall I?

* * *

An idealist is one who, on noticing that a rose smells better than a cabbage, concludes that it will also make better soup.

H. L. MENCKEN

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WINGS

From where would come the courage to take that desperate plunge?

by LIAM O'FLAHERTY

THE young seagull was alone on his ledge. His two brothers and his sister has already flown away the day before. He had been afraid to fly with them. Somehow when he had taken a little run forward to the brink of the ledge and attempted to flap his wings he became afraid. The great expanse of sea stretched down beneath, and it was such a long way down—miles down. He felt certain that his wings would never support him, so he bent his head and ran away back to the little hole under the ledge where he slept at night.

Even when each of his brothers and his little sister, whose wings were far shorter than his own, ran to the brink, flapped their wings, and flew away he failed to muster up courage to take that plunge which appeared to him so desperate. His father and mother had come around calling to him shrilly, upbraiding him, threatening to let him starve on his ledge unless he flew away. But for the life of him he could not move.

That was twenty-four hours ago. Since then nobody had come near him. The day before, all day long, he had watched his parents flying about with his brother and sister, perfecting them in the art of flight, teaching them how to skim the waves and how to dive for fish. He had, in fact, seen his older brother catch his first herring and devour it, standing on a rock, while his parents circled around raising a proud cackle. And all the morning the whole family had walked about on the big plateau midway down the opposite cliff, taunting him with his cowardice.

The sun was now ascending the sky, blazing warmly on his ledge that faced the south. He felt the heat because he had not eaten since the previous nightfall. Then he had found a dried piece of mackerel's tail at the far end of his ledge. Now there was not a single scrap of food left. He had searched every inch, rooting among the rough, dirt-caked straw nest where he and his brothers and sister had been hatched. He even gnawed at the dried pieces of spotted eggshell. It was like eating part of himself.

He had then trotted back and forth from one end of the ledge to the other, his grey body the colour of the cliff, his long grey legs

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stepping daintily, trying to find some means of reaching his parents without having to fly. But on each side of him the ledge ended in a sheer fall of precipice, with the sea beneath. And between him and his parents there was a deep, wide chasm.

Surely he could reach them without flying if he could only move northwards along the cliff face? But then on what could he walk? There was no ledge, and he was not a fly. And above him he could see nothing. The precipice was sheer, and the top of it was perhaps farther away than the sea beneath him.

He stepped slowly out to the brink of the ledge, and, standing on one leg with the other leg hidden under his wing, he closed one eye, then the other, and pretended to be falling asleep. Still they took no notice of him. He saw his two brothers and his sister lying on the plateau dozing, with their heads sunk into their necks. His father was preening the feathers on his white back. Only his mother was looking at him.

She was standing on a little high hump on the plateau, her white breast thrust forward. Now and again she tore at a piece of fish that lay at her feet, and then scraped each side of her beak on the rock. The sight of the food maddened him. How he loved to tear food that way, scraping his beak now and again to whet it! He uttered a low cackle. His mother cackled too, and looked over at him.

"Ga, ga, ga," he cried, begging her to bring him over some food. "Gawl-ool-ah," she screamed back derisively. But he kept calling plaintively, and after a minute or so he uttered a joyful scream. His mother had picked up a piece of the fish and was flying across to him with it. He leaned out eagerly, tapping the rock with his feet, trying to get nearer to her as she flew across. But when she was just opposite to him, abreast of the ledge, she halted, her legs hanging limp, her wings motionless, the piece of fish in her beak almost within reach of his beak.

He waited a moment in surprise, wondering why she did not come nearer, and then, maddened by hunger, he dived at the fish. With a loud scream he fell outwards and downwards into space. His mother had swooped upwards. As he passed beneath her he heard the swish of her wings.

Then a monstrous terror seized him and his heart stood still. He could hear nothing. But it only lasted a moment. The next moment he felt his wings spread outwards. The wind rushed against his breast feathers, then under his stomach and against his wings. He could feel the tips of his wings cutting through the air. He was not falling headlong now. He was soaring gradually downwards and outwards. He was no longer afraid. He just felt a bit dizzy. Then he flapped his wings once and he soared upwards.

He uttered a joyous scream and flapped them again. He soared

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higher. He raised his breast and banked against the wind. "Ga, ga, ga. Ga, ga, ga. Gawl-ool-ah." His mother swooped past him, her wings making a loud noise. He answered her with another scream. Then his father flew over him screaming. Then he saw his two brothers and sister flying around him, curveting and banking and soaring and diving.

Then he completely forgot that he had not always been able to fly, and commenced himself to dive and soar and curvet, shrieking shrilly.

He was near the sea now, flying straight over it, facing out over the ocean. He saw a vast green sea beneath him, with little ridges moving over it, and he turned his beak sideways and crowed amusedly. His parents and his brothers and sister had landed on this green floor in front of him. They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly. He dropped his legs to stand on the green sea. His legs sank into it. He screamed with fright and attempted to rise again, flapping his wings. But he was tired and weak with hunger and he could not rise, exhausted by the strange exercise. His feet sank into the green sea, and then his belly touched it and he sank no farther.

He was floating on it. And around him his family was screaming, praising him, and their beaks were offering him scraps of dog-fish.

He had made his first flight.

* * *

TECHNIQUE

It is easy to be rude on the Continent. You just shout and call names of a zoological character . . .

In England rudeness has quite a different technique. If somebody tells you an obviously untrue story, on the Continent you would remark "You are a liar, Sir, and a rather dirty one at that." In England you just say "Oh, is that so?" Or "That's rather an unusual story, isn't it?"

In the last century, when a wicked and unworthy subject annoyed the Sultan of Turkey or the Czar of Russia, he had his head cut off without much ceremony; but when the same happened in England, the monarch declared: "We are not amused"; and the whole British nation even now, a century later, is immensely proud of how rude their Queen was.

Terribly rude expressions (if pronounced grimly) are: "I am afraid that . . .", "unless . . .", "nevertheless . . .", "How queer . . ." and "I am sorry, but . . ."

GEORGE MIKES, *How to be an Alien*

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GOD REST YOU MERRY

Nay, gentlemen, prepare not to be-gone;
We have a trifling foolish banquet towards—

Romeo and Juliet

More than anything in the world Mary Talbot loved parties. She loved to give parties and she loved to go to parties. Since Tom Talbot didn't make much money Mary couldn't give parties all the time, so she tricked people into giving them. Sometimes she telephoned a friend and said bluntly: "Isn't it about time you gave a party?"

Regularly, Mary had six birthdays a year, and she organized costume parties, surprise parties, holiday parties. Christmas Eve at her house was a very exciting thing. For Mary glowed with parties . . .

In the afternoons when Tom was at work Mary sometimes gave tea-parties for the neighbourhood cats. She set a footstool with doll cups and saucers. She gathered the cats, and there were plenty of them, and then she held long and detailed conversations with them. It was a kind of play she enjoyed very much—a kind of satiric game, and it covered and concealed from Mary the fact that . . . the Talbots didn't have any money . . .

Mary Talbot gave a pregnancy party that year. And everyone said: "God! A kid of hers is going to have fun."

JOHN STEINBECK, *Cannery Row*

Wolcum

Wolcum be ye that arn here,
Wolcum alle and mak good chere,
Wolcum alle another yere,
Wolcum, Yol!

Author Unknown, Fifteenth Century

Christmas Eve

Christmas in Provence . . . No fir trees here, but olive trees. In the vast fireplaces of the hall they burn the yule log and spend the night sitting round it . . . The peasants, returning from Midnight Mass, cluster round the fire. And the grandfather tells old country legends while all drink great bowls of wine, warm and spiced . . . In the towns, Christmas Eve supper is a great

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tradition. The menu for this feast is pretty well the same each year.

It is generally oysters, black or mealy pudding, goose or turkey with chestnuts, *foie-gras* with salad, and rounded off with the so-called " yule log." This is an oblong cake covered with a thick layer of chocolate, marked to look like the bark of a tree. At the party that follows the Christmas Eve supper, punch made of rum poured on sliced oranges and set alight used to make for shouts of delight.

I say " used to " because these days tradition has had to give way to restrictions. But even they cannot prevent hearts welling up with the joy that comes from the Christmas Baby, hearts in which has just been born again He who is Resurrection and Life.

MARCELLE AUCLAIR, in *Christmas Lasts For Ever*

Benedicamus

For bread and salt, for grapes and malt,
For flesh and fish, and every dish :
Mutton and beefe, of all meates cheefe :
For Cow-heels, chitterlings, tripes and sowse,
And other meate thats in the house :
For backs, for brests, for legges, for loines,
For pies with raisons, and with proines :
For fritters, pancakes, and for frayes,
For venison pasties, and minct pies :
Sheephead and garlick, brawne and mustard,
Wafers, spiced cakes, tart and custard,
For capons, rabets, pigges and geese,
For apples, carawaies and cheese :
for all these and many moe,
Benedicamus domino.

JOSHUA COOKE, *Seventeenth Century*

Antidote

This is the true place to speak of the properties of chocolate flavoured with amber . . . Listen, then :

Let any man who shall have drunk too deeply of the cup of pleasure . . . let all such, we say, administer to themselves a good pint of Ambered Chocolate, allowing from sixty to seventy-two grains of amber to a pound, and they will see marvels.

In my own particular way of specifying things, I call ambered chocolate the *chocolate of the afflicted.*

J. A. BRILLAT-SAVARIN, *The Physiology of Taste, translated by* Peter Davies

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The Feast of the Little Men

It was now Christmas, and Per Gynt, having heard of a farm in the Dovre country where so many Trolls were accustomed to congregate on Christmas Eve that the people who lived there had to flee and find places to stay at other farms, decided to go there: for he thought he would like to see these Trolls. He put on torn clothing, and took with him a tame bear which belonged to him, together with an awl, some pitch, and some wire. When he reached the farm he went in and asked for shelter.

"God help us," cried the farmer . . . "The place is alive with Trolls every Christmas Eve!"

But Per thought he could manage to clear the farm of Trolls, so they told him to stay, and gave him a pig's skin in the bargain. Then the bear lay down behind the hearth, and Per took his awl, his pitch, and his wire, and made a large shoe out of the pig's skin, drawing a thick rope through it for a shoelace, having also at hand two wagon-spokes for wedges.

Suddenly the Trolls arrived with fiddles and fiddlers, and began to dance and to eat their Christmas dinner on the table, some eating fried bacon, some fried frogs and toads and things of that kind; for they had brought their Christmas dinner with them.

In the meantime some of them noticed the shoe Per Gynt had made, and since it was evidently intended for a large foot, all the Trolls wanted to try it on. When every one of them had thrust in his foot Per Gynt laced it, forced in a wedge, and drew the lace so tight that at last every one of them was caught and held in the shoe. But now the bear thrust forth his snout and sniffed the roast.

"Would you like some cake, little white cat?" said one of the Trolls, and threw a burning hot roasted frog into the bear's jaws.

"Thump them, Master Bruin!" cried Per Gynt: and the bear, very angry, rushed on the Trolls, raining blows and scratching on every side . . . The Trolls soon had to make themselves scarce, but Per remained and feasted on Christmas fare all the week, while for many a year no more was heard of the Trolls.

P. C. ASBJÖRNSEN, *Norwegian Fairy Book*

Thought for Today

Small cheer and great welcome makes a merry feast . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Comedy of Errors*

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GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT

"Let us make a little bargain," said the good Saint Galonnek

by ANTONIA RIDGE

THIS is a story told one Christmas Night by my Uncle Jules who owned a small café-restaurant in a busy back street of Marseilles. So I am not prepared to lay my hand on my heart and swear it is genuine folk-lore. Uncle Jules, you must understand, was a born *raconteur*. If a story could be improved upon, Uncle Jules wasted no time but enthusiastically and often most artistically improved it. Any limping, commonplace anecdote told by a stray traveller gulping down an early-morning coffee and rum for instance, always seemed to take on glittering, fantastic wings when retold that evening by Uncle Jules. Indeed old Gassin from the Bank once sourly remarked that even his notepaper bore witness to the soaring imagination of Uncle Jules, for on it his modest establishment was styled: "*Hôtel de l'Europe.*" *Modern Comfort. Oyster Bar. Bathrooms.*

The modern comfort was there all right; in fact it could be heard at the far end of the street such was the power and dash of its flush. And as Uncle Jules heatedly pointed out, the Oyster Bar and Bathrooms were on his notepaper in honest anticipation of the day when things would begin to look up a little, and he had the necessary leisure to discover a plumber who was not also a triple brigand.

Old Gassin retorted that this clearly demonstrated that my Uncle Jules was not only a romantic—he was also an unteachable optimist. But old Gassin was a cynic, having been married three times and each time most unsuitably. However to come back to this Christmas story . . .

As I said before, it was Christmas Night; a bitter mistral-wind blustered outside; it was very late; and the restaurant was deserted save for a chosen few invited by Uncle Jules to a festive dinner in my honour. Uncle Jules had done even more, he had uncorked a couple of truly aristocratic bottles, and there we sat before the roaring stove feeling extremely mellow and convivial. By special request I had given the company a brightly coloured picture of Yuletide in England, and I remember I had even ventured

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on a bold estimate of the ingredients of a traditional Christmas pudding.

"My God!" breathed old Gassin. "No wonder they tell ghost stories afterwards."

This sally naturally led to much brisk argument on the supernatural and presently Uncle Jules exploded:

"Psychic research, my sister! They make me laugh, these people, the tuppenny-ha'penny yarns they tell. You should have heard the tales my maternal grandmother used to tell. Now her ghosts *were* ghosts . . . fine, rip-roaring ruffians whom you'd be enchanted to meet in either world. And it was the same with her saints. None of your narrow-minded bigots for my grannie, but free and easy types who'd willingly give the devil a break . . . within reason of course."

I'll never forget her saint Galonnek of Brittany, said my Uncle Jules. According to my grannie, this amicable saint was out and about his lawful business at crack of dawn one frosty Christmas Eve when he heard a powerful bass voice singing away in the distance. Very partial to a rousing tune, he listened with pleasure for a moment or so, and then hastily drew his hood well over his head as the words to this particular melody were too indecorous even for his broadminded ears, being all about a plump and obliging young milliner who was more than a daughter to the regiment.

"*Péchère*! Must be the miller," decided the saint, not in the least uncharitably since all millers were considered hell-born in those simple days. However when he turned into the high-road, there under the gallows sat no miller but a handsome young Gascon, a scarlet poppy stuck behind one pointed ear.

Now it wasn't only the sight of a poppy blazing there in the cold December dawn that made the prudent old saint cross himself with such assiduity. No, no, it was the way the snow had melted all about the singer, and the faint, acrid whiff of scorching that hung on the icy air. And more disturbing even than all this, was the plaintive whimpering that came from a bulging sack on which he drummed two polished cloven hooves as he carolled:

And the regiment will never forget, tra-la-la,
The regiment will ever regret, tra-la-la,
The roving black eyes of her,
The soft, sultry sighs of her . . .

"Ahem!" loudly coughed Saint Galonnek, sensible that the regiment would have even more deplorable memories of this gay baggage of a milliner. And then drawing himself up very tall, he roared, "*Vade retro, Satana!*"

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"Oh no, you don't!" jeered the impious singer. "No whisking me off in that easy way. This charming spot is free for all. Furthermore I'm not his imperial majesty, the Prince of Darkness, but a junior aide-de-camp, an up-and-coming one, though I mention it myself. His satanic majesty is going to be devilishly pleased with this last little haul of mine for instance." And he gave the squirming sack a triumphant kick and grinned with all his white teeth at the anguished yells that tore up from its dark interior.

"*Misericordia*!" cried the saint. "What poor souls have you there?"

"Oh, a hand-picked collection, I assure you! None of your ten-a-penny milliners and back-alley drabs, but as true as I'm sitting here gently scorching this gallows-tree, I've a jewel of a Jesuit, a plump pigeon of a Sister of Charity, a most distinguished Dominican, and a gilt-edged Archbishop."

"*Bon sang de Dieu*!" groaned the horrified saint. "And on Christmas Eve, too!"

"Precisely," gloated the fiend, "so you must forgive me if I sound a little jubilant. This will mean promotion for me or my name's not William."

"Listen, William," said the saint urgently. "You are very young and you have all Eternity to carve your evil way, so why not make a little bargain with me? Give me these souls and you shall spend this blessed day on earth, free of all the pangs of hell, free to wander where you will, free as any Christian soul . . ."

"Not so fast," objected William. "If I agree to release these extremely valuable sinners . . . and I must point out that the operative word is 'if' . . . do I retain all my powers?"

"But certainly," promised Saint Galonnek, "but only to do good, of course. And naturally I shall have to know where you propose to spend these hours of happy respite."

"Oh, anywhere quiet will suit me," murmured William, and a strange green light flamed for a moment in his cold black eyes. "Shall we say Konkored?"

"Agreed! Konkored!" cried the saint with the utmost satisfaction, and then for dear honesty's sake, added, "But I feel I ought to warn you that save for a couple of decent Catholic souls, the whole of that accursed parish is past praying for . . . hell-bound heretics every single one. So it won't be much of a change for you."

"Really?" said William, and again the queer light danced in his black eyes. "Then I shall feel hellishly at home there. Moreover it will be extremely restful, for though I shall loyally stand to my engagement to use my powers only to do good, you can hardly expect me to waste the precious hours gadding round playing the philanthropist."

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"Quite! Quite!" agreed the fair-minded saint. "Now pass me that bag of souls, and for one whole day, go then in peace to Konkored!"

With a joyous whoop, William kicked the bag well into the middle of the road; there was a blinding flash; and he was gone.

"*Deo gratias*!" sighed the saint, but suddenly the satisfied smile froze on his rosy face. That queer green light in William's black eyes . . . he recognized it now for what it was: mockery, unholy satanic mockery. Then his face cleared again. *Vaï*! What harm could the arch-fiend himself do in that sink of black heresy? As for those two devout Christian souls, their piety was well-nigh impregnable, braced as it was with gratitude to Heaven that they were not as their neighbours. All the same it might be as well to take intelligent, though of course honourable, precautions . . .

And the provident saint bundled the sack of distinguished sinners under a nearby hedge, sternly warned them that he would be back to deal with them later, and at once sought out two very startled guardian angels.

"H'm!" he said, sharply eyeing their smooth, unlined faces, their sleek unruffled wings. "It is to be hoped that your sinecure on earth has not played the devil with your powers of persuasion."

"Oh no, of course not," expostulated the angels.

"Then listen to me, and with both ears," ordered Saint Galonnek. And he poured out his story.

"But if this . . . er . . . William can only use his powers to do good—" began one angel.

"It may be news to you," rapped the saint, "but hell is paved with good intentions. At this very moment William may be hovering benevolently round one or the other of your charges. I advise you to fly to your action stations without delay. I have a very full day before me but I shall look in at Konkored about midnight to speed the parting guest. Kindly see to it that he spends a blameless and most unprofitable day."

As he bustled away the two angels smiled primly at each other. Really, the dear old saint was over-anxious. However they spread their lovely wings and with one faultless sweep landed, unseen of course, on the busy market square of Konkored. Instantly all sweet complacency fell from them. There, in a quiet corner under the plane trees stood a tall lean stranger, a black-eyed stranger with a scarlet poppy tucked behind one pointed ear. And he was deep in conversation with pious old Yves, the herbalist.

"Yes, sir," Yves was saying, "I make all my salves and potions from the sweet and bitter herbs that grow in the hedges and fields, but it is as you say, the louder the voice, the bigger the lie, the

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bigger and more generous the crowd. My remedies for coughs, chilblains, corns and consumption are as sound and honest as ever they were, but my old voice, alas, is the worse for wear. So trade is bad, very bad. However I have only myself to keep, my poor wife being dead and gone these twenty years." And Yves crossed himself and muttered a pious "*Requiescat.*"

"Amen," hastily sympathized the stranger. "All the same, it quite grieves me to see so honest a herbalist having so hard a time of it. But I believe I can help you. Take a look at this, Yves."

He pulled out a small, silver box, most exquisitely engraved. Inside, on a scarlet silk lining, glowed three yellow lozenges.

"Mother of God!" gasped old Yves. "They shine like the morning star."

"As indeed they might," said the stranger reverently. "They were made to a secret and most potent nostrum of the late Archbishop himself, a most eloquent prelate who would have talked himself into the triple tiara . . . had he been spared. Take one, Yves, suck it slowly and then cry your wares and see how your sales will soar."

"But, but, sir," stammered Yves. "I must think of my immortal soul. If this be witchcraft . . ."

"Witchcraft!" gently chided the stranger. "Come, come, Yves, did I not tell you this was the sovereign remedy of His Grace, the late Lord Archbishop? Take one, Yves, it will do you good."

And before his agitated guardian angel had time to whisper a warning, old Yves had taken one of the lovely lozenges, and was sucking it rapturously. Then he threw back his head and called his wares. Immediately every head turned, and every man, woman and child moved towards him, drawn by the beauty and power of his voice. And such was his new and shining eloquence that soon every sufferer was eagerly buying his simples, and indeed many bursting with rude health felt impelled to lay in a stock—just in case.

"*Miserere*!" groaned Yves' guardian angel. "Look at him! Listen to him! He grows drunk with his own fine words."

It was true. For the first time in all his bleak life, old Yves was tasting the heady, treacherous essence of eloquence. And oh, how wonderful, how easy it was! Why, he could sell these people anything . . . anything. He could do what he liked with them. So must a king feel . . . an emperor. Strange, alluring visions came crowding about him. He stretched out both hands to grasp them. "Friends," he trumpeted.

At the new note in his lovely, compelling voice, an unholy flame leaped in the black eye of the stranger standing there on the

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fringe of the crowd, and he turned and went swiftly away.

The angels exchanged urgent glances. "I must wrestle with Yves," said one and threw back his shining wings, spat on his smooth white hands, and prepared to give battle.

"And I must follow that dark stranger," said the other. "I have an uneasy feeling he is about to do another good deed, and this time to the good soul in *my* charge." And he spread his great wings and took majestic flight.

But alas, with his usual polished speed, William was already on the most excellent terms with the Widow Labise by the time her less-practised angel glided down to her cottage door.

"Oh, yes, sir," the widow was saying, as she wiped away a tear with her apron, "she was my foster-sister. I well remember the day she took her vows. She made the sweetest Sister of Charity, slender as a lily for all her thick serge robes."

"Ah me!" murmured William. "Where are the lilies of yester-year? I fear your dear sister put on a little weight during her last years in this vale of tears. *Sic transit* . . . But to come to the object of my visit. It is to hand you something your sister valued most highly." And from under his cloak, he pulled a plain round wooden platter.

The good widow's face fell.

"Ah," said William softly. "I perceive you are asking yourself why I have taken the trouble to travel all the long way from Rennes merely to hand you so plain and humble a keepsake of the dear departed. Listen, madame, this platter is no ordinary dish. When next you sit down to your frugal repast, give it the place of honour on your table. Then order any little delicacy you may happen to fancy, and I promise it will appear forthwith."

"*Seigneur Dieu*!" gasped the widow.

"Your dear foster-sister found it most convenient," purred William. "I think you will be equally satisfied. Try it, madame, try it."

"Well, sir, I dearly love a calf's head," began the widow. And lo, before the words were out of her mouth, there on the platter steamed a succulent head.

"Maybe a little something to follow?" suggested William with the insinuating grace of a Viennese *maître d'hôtel*. "But take your time. Don't be afraid. Expense no object. I am afraid I must be off, however. *Au revoir, madame, et bon appétit*!"

He bowed himself out and ceremoniously closed the door behind him, then he swiftly stooped to peer through the key-hole. And what he saw obviously delighted him, for he turned a joyous somersault, picked up his scarlet poppy, stuck it behind his pointed ear again, and sauntered merrily away.

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Then every gleaming feather a-bristle, into the cottage swept the angel . . . and drew up sharply, his smooth face pale with dismay. There on the table still steamed the calf's head but now it was flanked with a roast goose, a rabbit-pie, a crisp green salad, a loaf of white bread, a great pat of golden butter, and a dish of sweet wild strawberries. And there, eyes shining, knife and fork at the ready, sat the widow just about to order a bottle of vintage wine to wash down her little banquet.

"*Ab incursu et daemonio meridiano*!" prayed the angel, and plucking at the widow's conscience, he sought for words, mighty valorous words that would drown the invitation to gluttony now rising in perfumed smoke and filling all the tiny cottage.

Very late that night, Saint Galonnek came briskly along the high road to Konkored. "Ah, there you are at last," called a voice, and there was William sitting on a heap of stones.

"Had a nice day?" asked the kindly saint.

"Bored to the hooves," yawned William. "I paid a couple of calls, oh, strictly in the interests of the parties concerned as per our gentlemen's agreement. And then I called on my old friend, the miller. But he was out, so I spent the rest of the day giving pep-talks to your local Korrigans. Pleasant little trolls, fine dancers and all that, but absolutely no imagination . . . always the same old stories . . . the same old spells. But, curse me, what's that?"

Well might William start and begin to grind his excellent teeth, for down the road, led by two nuns carrying tall candles, came a dancing, singing band of children. And in their joyous midst walked the widow Labise, reverently carrying the wooden platter.

"Oh, sir," she cried as she caught sight of William, "this dish must indeed have belonged to a blessed saint for in one short day it has provided a wonderful Christmas dinner for all these dear orphans, and enough flour, beans, and salted bacon to feed them for many a long day. And now we are on our way to place it in the holy care of His Grace our new Archbishop. He shall hear of your Christian charity. Thank the kind gentleman, children, thank him!"

"You're welcome," grinned William and bowed with courtly grace as a shrill chorus of praise tore up to the frosty sky and with many a bob and curtsey they went on their grateful way.

"*Vaï*!" cried Saint Galonnek. "Now I know I must be dreaming," and he pointed an incredulous finger.

And there, along the road towards them now streamed a long, long procession led by old Yves, swinging a great lantern and singing loud hymns of praise.

"Oh, sir," he called as he set eyes on William, "that holy

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lozenge did all you claimed and far, far more. Look, look, I have wakened the conscience of all my neighbours who were lost in black heresy, every one! And now I lead them to be shrived of their sins by His Grace our new Archbishop. Blessings on your head, kind sir! You have saved every soul in Konkored. *Alleluia! Alleluia!*"

"*Et tu* . . ." hissed William, and slowly turned a ghastly green, for there in the wake of all those singing penitents, his fervent "*peccavi*" filling all the icy air, walked the most unblushing sinner in all Brittany—Perrik, the miller.

Side by side, silent, unsmiling, Saint Galonnek and William watched them go. Presently the last *alleluia* died away, and they were alone. Overhead a million stars sparkled, a branch of a tree cracked and fell to the frozen ground, and from far, far away came the clanging of Christmas bells.

Then William turned and looked long at Saint Galonnek. And still that gallant gentleman made no sign nor let triumphant word escape him. And suddenly William shook with laughter, bitter laughter, that sent the hot tears streaming down his twisted face. "Ah well," he choked, "tomorrow is another day." He braced himself against the wind; there was a sharp flash of flame; and he was gone.

"*Laudate!*" croaked two hoarse voices, and there high overhead drooped two exhausted angels. They hovered—expectant. Came no grateful words of praise. "H'm," grunted Saint Galonnek eyeing their worn faces, their bedraggled wings. "That'll teach you! That'll teach you to keep on the wing."

And he turned on his heel and went whistling into the crisp December night.

"Yes," sighed my Uncle Jules, "he was a great saint, my granny's Saint Galonnek. *Sapristi*, we'll drink to him!"

And up we jumped and cried, "*Vive, vive le bon Saint* Galonnek!"

"*Et vive ce brave* William," cried a mocking voice.

I spun round, my hair on end. But it was old Gassin of course. I told you he was a cynic.

* * *

PER ARDUA

As the going up a sandy way is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man.

ECCLESIASTICUS

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WHERE EARLY FA'S THE DEW

"It's always a pleasure to aid in a choritable wurrk," said Mr. Glencannon

by GUY GILPATRIC

JUST west of where Glasgow's Fennieston Street meets the not-so-bonnie north bank of the Clyde and changes its name to Fennieston Quay, there rears a building as grim as the Bastille, austere as the Papal Palace of Avignon, and vast as the Moscow Kremlin. From this it is not to be concluded that the massive pile follows any particular style of architecture for, quite obviously, the construction of its main body could have involved only a spirit level, four plumb bobs, and sufficient bricks. Surmounting it, however, is what appears from a distance to be a spire, belvedere, or minaret but proves on nearer view to be the gigantic image of a whisky bottle. Upon the label is a picture of a Highland piper and the cockle-warming words:

DUGGAN'S DEW OF KIRKINTILLOCH

Two stories below the bottle and extending full across the citadel's façade is a sign which identifies the premises as Warehouse No. 1, Export Division and Executive Offices of Mackenzie Duggan & Company, Ltd., whose distilleries, as all the world knows, are located in the nearby suburb where falls that fabulous dew which bears its name. Glasgow citizens of a mathematical turn have estimated that the whisky stored in Duggan's Warehouse No. 1, if released and permitted to cascade into the Queens Dock over the way, would fill all three basins to a depth sufficient to float the considerable shipping berthed therein—provided, of course, that the citizens themselves didn't get there first. Actually, the precious product emerges only in neat wooden cases, which are transported by electric tram along Stobcross Quay to vessels waiting to ferry them over the oceans of this thirsty world.

On a winter afternoon not long ago, one of the ships engaged in loading Duggan's Dew was a British tramp called the *Inchcliffe Castle*. Now, whisky is whisky and man is frail; and so, as the slings laden with cases were hoisted inboard and lowered gently into the holds, the mates kept an eye on the stevedores, the dock police

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kept an eye on the mates, and certain unobtrusive gentlemen employed by the underwriters kept an eye on the police, the mates, the stevedores, and on one another. It was heartening to find on the ship one man whose lofty spirit soared above such sordidness, suspicion, and distrust.

He was the Chief Engineer, Mr. Colin Glencannon, who, less than an hour previously, labouring deep in the bowels of the ship, had unbolted but not removed the cover of a manhole in the roof of the shaft tunnel. At a later and auspicious time, when the *Inchcliffe Castle* should be somewhere between Port Said and Hong Kong he planned to climb up through the manhole into No. 3 hold and snaffle the whisky stowed therein at his own good leisure and to his heart's content.

Now, however, he was seated at the table in the officers' saloon, rapt in the ecstasies of epistolary composition. The letter, anonymous and in disguised handwriting, hinted at a plot to broach the cargo, described Mr. Glencannon's honesty and devotion to duty in laudatory terms but made things distinctly grim for Mr. Montgomery, the Mate. It would, of course, be posted from some distant port to the *Inchcliffe*'s owners in London, before the broaching was discovered but too late to prevent it.

"Haw!" he chuckled as he read over the first page. "As I've stated the circumstontial details, lying willna save him and telling the truth will only involve him deeper. It will cost him his job, his ticket and perhaps e'en a few years in jail! Losh! It's a braw neat pronk, any way ye look at it!"

Once more taking pen in hand, he addressed his efforts to Page Two. He was endeavouring to recall how many S's occur in "pusillanimous" and had about decided to make it "stinking" instead, when he was interrupted by a knock on the door. Looking up, he saw thrust past the portal's edge a broad, beaming, but unfamiliar face, topped by a black felt hat and based upon a snowy clerical collar.

"Ah!" said the face, mellifluously, as though intoning the opening note of a Gregorian chant, "Ah! Did I—ah—do I interrupt, Captain?"

"Both," said Mr. Glencannon. "But dinna let it discourage ye. As one o' the staunchest pillars o' the Scottish Presbyterian Kirk, I am always glod to weelcome a gentlemon o' the cloth, no motter how fallacious his doctrines or unopportune his intrusion. In other wurrds, come in, my reeverend sir, come in!"

"Ah, thank you! I shall be—ah—most happy to do so!"

He entered, bringing with him a suitcase which he placed upon the table. "Permit me to introduce myself, Captain. I am the Reverend Clarence McDill, chaplain and, if I may say so, the

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amicus humani generis in charge of the Mavisbank Home For Aged and Infirm Seamen."

"Aye? Pray sit ye doon!" Mr. Glencannon invited. "However," his voice and mein took on a dignified austerity, "however, in justice to mysel', I am constrained to infoorm ye, with emphasis, that I am no' the captain o' this ship. If I were, I can assure ye that we'd no be furthering Satan's wurrk by loading yon whusky! Phew!" He shuddered and cupped his hand over his nose, at the same time slipping a peppermint lozenge into his mouth. "Phew! The reek o' the fulthy stuff pollutes the vurra otmosphere!"

"Phew! It does indeed!" agreed the clergyman, warmly. "Alas, to think of the wealth, the fortunes squandered each year in its purchase! If only this money, if only a tithe of it, could be diverted to worthy causes! And that, sir, prompts me to observe that our Home is sorely in need of funds and brings us to the reason for my visit. You see, the institution is not endowed—no, not even to the extent of a single groat! It is supported entirely by our own efforts and by the generosity of upright men who, like yourself . . ."

"Yere ain efforts?" Mr. Glencannon interrupted, hastily and heartily. "Weel, weel, weel, how vurra commendable! I'm always interested in hearing o' ways to mak' money. Just what do yere efforts consist of, if I mucht osk?"

"Why, er, handicraft—the manufacture of knicknacks—you know the sort of things old sailors make. As a matter of fact," he clicked open the suitcase, "as a matter of fact, I have a few bits of our work right here. Now, just consider these face cloths, for instance—all hand-woven and only sixpence apiece. Beautiful craftsmanship, isn't it?"

"Sublime!" said Mr. Glencannon.

"Ah, thank you—you're really very kind! Now, let's see—I've three—five—seven—yes, I've exactly a dozen of them left!"

"Only a dozen?" said Mr. Glencannon, registering keen disappointment. "Weel, I'm afraid we'll have to forget it, then. A dozen face cloths wudna last me any time!"

"No? Too bad! But—ah—perhaps you could use one of these handsome carved bone napkin rings?"

"Only with the utmost difficulty," said Mr. Glencannon. "Ye see, I had the misfortune to be born left-handed."

"Dear, dear! But—ah—would you mind explaining what that's got to do with it?"

"That's exockly where the difficulty comes in," said Mr. Glencannon. "Oh, it's all vurra cumplicated, e'en obscure, as yere ain question omply deemonstrates. But noo, what other clever little knicknocks have ye got?"

From the suitcase the Reverend Mr. McDill produced a bottle

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within which, embedded in waves of painted plaster, was the beautifully-wrought model of a cargo ship. He set the bottle upon a little stand of varnished wood and proudly waved his hand at it. "There!" he said. "Isn't it a gem—a masterpiece? Think of the skill, the patience, the toil required to construct it, piece by piece, within the narrow confines of that common bottle!"

"Common bottle?" Mr. Glencannon repeated, a trifle tartly. "Why, it's a Duggan's bottle, as the wurrding in the glass plainly indicates!"

"Of course! Just an ordinary, standard whisky bottle—precisely my point! Have you ever seen anything like it?"

"Aye," Mr. Glencannon nodded. "The auld windjammer-sailors used to fritter awa' their spare time making them, when they weren't too busy getting flogged, having scurvy, falling overboard south o' Cape Horn, or being trompled on by the bucko mates. How much are ye osking for it, Reeverend?"

"Eighteen shillings. Only eighteen shillings! Come—surely that interests you!"

"Aye, intensely! Ye see, I know a firm in Hong Kong, Chiang Foo and Company, that turns them oot for five sheelings each, and I wanted to check up. It just goes to show the grave danger that confronts us all—namely, the assaults upon our industry by yellow-bellied Oriental competition, made possible through the low standards o' living whuch obtain throughoot their benighted labouring closses. The fault, o' course, lies squarely in the lap o' this government's ossinine furreign policy."

"Eh? Oh, why, ah, yes, I daresay it does," murmured the Reverend Mr. McDill, perplexed but still polite. He sat silent for a moment. "Well, I—ah—I'm rather afraid that my little visit, though most pleasant, has contributed little to the welfare of the Mavisbank Home. However, in parting, I should like to make a humble contribution to the welfare of this vessel's crew. I have found that most sailors are literally starved for reading matter, poor fellows! These old magazines and periodicals . . ." he took a stack of them from his suitcase, ". . . Would you mind having them distributed among the brave lads in the forecastle?"

"Oh, glodly and with great guid will!" said Mr. Glencannon. "It's always a pleasure to aid in a choritable wurrk."

When the minister had gone, Mr. Glencannon went through the pile of magazines. Selecting a torn copy of the *Northern Swine Breeder*, he bade the steward take it forward and bestow it upon the crew with his blessing. Then, having arranged the others on the sideboard, he returned to his letter.

When supper was over that evening Mr. Montgomery strolled

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to the sideboard for a toothpick and spied the magazines. "My word, 'ere's a bit o' luck!" he exclaimed. "'Ere's the larst month's issue of *Beelzebub's Broth*, official organ of the International League of Militant Teetotallers, of which I have the honour of being a member of! 'Oo brought orl these 'ere pypers aboard, does anybody know?"

"I know," said Mr. Glencannon. "They were brought by an elderly divine, who was endeavouring to whustle up funds for the Mavisbank Home for Aged and Infeerm Seamen."

"Oh, why that must've been the Reverend Mr. McDill, the Chairman of our Glasgow Council. 'E's an old friend of mine. But, f-f-f!" Mr. Montgomery sneered, "If 'e 'oped to whistle up any funds out of you, Mr. Glencannon, he should 'ave brought along a foghorn and a megaphone!"

"Muster Mate, I think yere remark is uncalled for and unkind," said Mr. Glencannon righteously. "As a matter of fact, the reeverend gentlemon and I passed a vurra pleasant half hour, discussing theology and looking ower the hondiwurrk o' his auld brukken-doon pensioners. But when we got aroond to the subject o' finonce and he started asking exhorbitant prices, lik' eighteen shillings for a toy ship in an empty whusky bottle, I . . ."

"Eighteen shillings? Only eighteen shillings—for one o' them 'andsome ship-in-a-bottle parlour ornaments? Why, that was a jolly fine bargain, if you arsk me!"

"I didn't osk ye," said Mr. Glencannon, shortly.

"Well, I'm telling you anyway," said Mr. Montgomery. "It's 'ell's own job to build one o' them things, and eighteen bob was dirt cheap. Why, it represents a week's work, at the very least!"

"A week's wurrk, foosh!" snorted Mr. Glencannon. "I cud mak' one o' the sumple little gadgets in eight or ten hours with the greatest o' ease!"

"The 'ell yer could!" scoffed Mr. Montgomery. "In fact, now look, listen, 'ere's wot I'll do with yer!—I'll bet yer five quid in good, 'ard cash that yer can't even do it between now and this time tomorrer night! Now, wot d'yer say to that?"

"Put up yere money!" cried Mr. Glencannon, producing his wallet and counting out five one pound notes. "Here, Captain Ball, I'll osk ye please to witness the bet and hold the stakes, sir!"

"Yus, Captain—you be the stake 'older and referee. Now, 'ere's the bet—let's write it down in my notebook so's there'll be no argument. Er, 'Chauncey Montgomery bets Colin Glencannon five pounds cash that Glencannon cannot build an approximate scale model of a ship'—let's say of this 'ere ship—'inside of a bottle, by seven o'clock tomorrer night. The finished ship must be in an ordinary empty whisky bottle and not some other kind of a bottle

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with a wide neck.'—Do yer agree to that ?"

"I do!" said Mr. Glencannon. "Moreover, I'll start wurrk richt the noo. Oh, haw, haw, haw, ye puir deluded gowk! Ye micht as weel let Captain Ball hond over the money without further ado!"

"'E'll 'and it over when and if yer win it—which yer won't!" chuckled Mr. Montgomery.

Going aft to the poop, where the carpenter's and bosun's shops were located, Mr. Glencannon helped himself to wood, tools, glue, paint and plaster; then, descending to the engine room, he fashioned an assortment of probes, hooks and tweezers of spring steel wire. "There, noo!" he said. "All that remains is to provide an empty bottle, which I shall proceed to do in the comfort and privacy of my ain room."

Now a Duggan's bottle contains four-fifths of a quart of whisky, or enough to fill three water tumblers. Having but one tumbler available, Mr. Glencannon was obliged to fill it, drink it, fill it, drink it again and then fill it a third time before the bottle was adequately prepared. So powerful was the creative urge stirring within him that he accomplished this task with surprising rapidity. "Ah, swith!" he exclaimed, approvingly, "at this rate, I'll have the job finished in no time! Noo, let's see, let's see—what's the next step? H'm!" He slipped a pair of inside calipers down the bottle neck and then applied them to his scale. "Seeven-eighths o' an inch, scontly," he read. "That means I'll have to mak' the hull in two sections. I'll just finish up this whusky, to sharpen my intellect and steady my hond."

Swiftly, deftly and with consummate skill he drained the tumbler dry. "Dom, what progress!" he gloated. "Why, I'm sorry I didna bet him ten pounds that I'd have it finished by bedtime!" As he gauged the bottle's internal depth, it occurred to him that as the work proceeded and the ship took form, he would need another bottle from which to take measurements and to serve as a medium for checkup.

Fortunately, he happened to have several more at hand and though all were full, he was now so entirely in the spirit of his task that he emptied one of them as effortlessly as though building ship models had been his lifelong occupation. It was with pardonable pride that he reviewed the speed of his work thus far.

"Haw, why, it's proctically as guid as finished!" he applauded himself. "Ye've plenty o' time, slathers o' time, so there's no reason to owertax yersel'. Ye really must remember that e'en yere ain extrodinurra powers have a limit. Slow doon, lad—aye, relax yersel' a bit. Sit back for just a minute, do, and give yere puir taut nairves a chonce to untongle! Indeed, if I were you, I'd tak' a sowp

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o' whusky, merely to ease the tension. Ye wud ? Aye, if ye want my frank and condid opinion, I wud ! Weel, alricht, then, I will, and I thonk ye most sincerely. But only a wee nip, mind—not too much—not too much ! Ho, why guid losh, mon, ye've poured me a reegular Second Mate's sun-dooner !

" Weel—" he raised his glass politely, " as lang as ye're buying this drink, auld mon—as lang as ye've indicated yere disposition to let bygones be bygones and bury auld grudges—a-weel, as I was aboot to say, as lang as—Sh-h-h ! Sh-h-h ! Noo please, lad, I know ye've been drinking, but dinna interrupt me !—Er—as I was aboot to remark, as lang as ye're buying this drink, bygones are bygones, as far as I'm concerned. Pairhops it's a weakness on my part, but somehow—somehow, I canna find it in my heart to harbour a grudge. I'm big hearted, and my big heart goes oot to ye most heartily ! My heart is in the richt place, laddie—dinna let them mislead ye with any song-and-donce to the contrary !—Song and donce ? Ho, splendid ! I'll sing while you donce !—Ready ?

My heart is in the Hielands
My heart is richt here !
My heart is in the Hielands a-chasing the deer
Auld gir-r-r-l, they sing o'—er, wait, oh yes, they
Sing-a-hi, sing-a-lee, sing-a-lo !
—That means I want to go
To Tokyo-ho-ho and a bottle o' rum !
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle o' rum !
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle o' rum !

" Yo-ho-ho and a no, no, no ! Dom it mon, ye've said that three times already and it isn't rum anyway ! Weel, supposing I have ? —That's still no excuse for ye to yawn ho-ho-ho in my face, is it ? If ye're feeling sleepy, why dinna ye go hame and sleep it off ? Aye, go hame, go on hame—nobody here will miss ye ? Foosh, ye've been a wet blanket on the party all evening ! And another thing—if ye weren't a common boor, ye'd know enough to cover yere oogly mouth when ye're yawning ! Where the heel are yere manners ? "

His glass empty, he sat glowering for a moment ; then, realizing that nobody seemed inclined to buy a drink, he poured one for himself. " Oh, vurra weel ! " he said, loftily. " If that's the way it is, weel, that's the tway it is it was !—In other wurrds, and I'm telling ye to yere face, I dinna lik' yere nosty, pairsimonious and truculent ottitude. Foosh to ye ! Foosh, foosh, foosh, I say ! Do ye wish me to understond from that that ye're threatening me with physic—ick !—hic !—physical violence, richt here in my ain room ?—Have a care, sir, have a care, I warn ye ! Ach ! Argh ! Ho, so ye wud, wud

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ye? Weel, then, tak'—*THAT*" with a mighty full armed swing of the bottle, he clouted himself over the head and wilted senseless to the floor.

When Mr. Glencannon opened his eyes, the light of dawn was filtering through the porthole. Rising somewhat unsteadily, he looked out and saw the giant bottle on the Duggan Warehouse silhouetted against a paling wintery sky; it served to remind him of the task in hand. "Ah, swith!" he muttered. "Why, I must have been seized with an attack of vertigo!—Losh, how my head aches!" He pressed his hand to the throbbing crown of it and was surprised to feel a lump like half a cricket ball. "Horrors, what's this?—Vertigo doesna break oot in loomps! No! I was stricken with an acute attack o' ower-expansion o' the brain, provoked by turning on too much intellectual pressure! Braugh! A little more, only a little more, and my skull wud have been blown to frogments, lik' an exploding boiler! Ho, dom it, Glencannon, ye've had a miraculous escape!"

He turned to the tools and materials spread out upon his bunk, "Noo, let's see, where were we? Oh, yes; I'd just estoblished the fact that the neck o' the bottle measures appruximately seven-eighths o' an inch. A-weel, it's foortunate I'd made such ropid progress before illness struck me doon, because noo I can add the finishing touches at my leisure!—Strange how weak and shaky a seizure o' that sort leaves a mon! Indeed, under the caircumstances, I think I'd be omply justified in taking a mild stimulant o' some sort."

Suiting the action to the word and by it much refreshed, he fell to work in earnest, only pausing for occasional dollops of the health-giving elixir. For hour after hour, then, he toiled; but, though he made a certain amount of headway, he found himself increasingly beset with knotty problems and vexatious setbacks. Poking the tiny, glue-smeared bits of wood down the bottle neck on lengths of wire and endeavouring to fix them into place was no whit less difficult than repairing a watch while wearing boxing gloves. Perversely, the little pieces came unstuck, adhered to the sides of the bottle or even to its bottom. His fingers became sticky, then stickier, and so did his glass, until finally he was obliged to work with only one hand. It was all most fatiguing.

To make matters worse, he was not feeling well. His malady was peculiar in that it was characterized by two distinct but diametrically-opposing symptoms. In plain, non-medical language he felt as though he were drunk and had a hangover at the same time. He could account for neither condition *per se* and as the two together were in flat contradiction, he could only conclude that he was the victim of some new, obscure, but in any case grave affliction. As he

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sat wondering what he should do about it, his gaze drifted to a bottle of whisky which happened to be on the washstand at the other end of the room.

"A-weel," he said, "it's a lang way off and I dinna feel lik' taking much exercise, but pairhaps a little whusky is exockly what I need. It's a Spartan reemedy, o' course, but the emeergency leaves me no choice. But—what's this? Ach! Horrors! I—I canna stond up!—I'm helpless!—I'm p-p-parolyzed! Ah, cruel heaven, what have I done to desairve a fate lik' this?" He clapped one hand to his brow and the other to his poor, useless limbs, discovering as he did so that he had sat in a puddle of glue and that the seat of his trousers was firmly cemented to the chair.

The discovery eased his mind but not his situation. Although he loosened his belt and undid his buttons, his trousers and the chair had become so inseparably one that, struggle as he would, he could not work clear of them. His efforts involved much thumping, banging, and bad language. Mr. Swales, in the next room, pounded on the bulkhead. "Oh, for the love of Gord, you chaps!" he complained. "I'm trying to study!"

Mr. Glencannon was too deeply occupied to retort. At length, toppling sideways to the floor, trousers, chair and all, he succeeded in squirming his way to freedom. Battered as to body and tattered as to drawers, he took a drink and another chair and doggedly returned to work.

It was well along in the afternoon when he was ready to perform the most delicate operation of all—the raising and stepping of the masts. Now, the entire science of building ships in bottles consists in the trick by which this feat is accomplished. When the hull is inserted in the bottle, the masts are laid flat, or nearly so, their steps being grooved to the rear to permit the sticks to swing backward; the single continuous thread which will become the fore, triatic and after stays has been made fast to the stern and to both mastheads and passed through a tiny hole in the bow, its end left dangling from the bottle neck. If this has been done according to the rules of art, all that remains is to pull on the free end until the masts rise into place, to dab a drop of glue on the thread where it passes through the hole, to snip off the surplus and lo! the trick is done.

In the present case, however, the thread had worked itself into the bottle and Mr. Glencannon was obliged to fish for it with his tweezers. Though he succeeded several times in nipping hold of it, it slipped from his tweezers before he could pull it out of the bottle. It was tantalizing, exasperating! At length, judging it to be within reach of his little finger, he thrust that digit down the bottle neck, pressed it firmly upon the refractory cordage and then endeavoured

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to withdraw it. To his chagrin and dismay, he found his finger caught as in a trap.

"Ah, dom and foosheroo!" he growled, tugging until his joints cracked. "Ow! Ouch! Noo, here's a pretty kettle o' fish! There must have been some glue on my finger, or pairhops it swelled while I was groping aroond with it. A-weel," he stood up, "I'll just hold it above my head for a minute or so, to reduce the blood circulation and the swelling, and then . . ."

With a resounding crash, the bottle shattered against a deckhead girder and rained in fragments upon him. For an instant he stood stunned; then red rage engulfed him and he gave it full expression.

"'Ere, 'ere, now!" Mr. Swalës's voice came plaintively from the next room. "I'm going up for my Master's exams next Chewsday, and 'ow in 'ell can I study? If you chaps don't cut it out in there I'll bleddy well come in and lick the three of yer!"

Mr. Glencannon surveyed the wreckage and then consulted his watch.

"Five o'clock P.M.!" he gasped. "Five o'clock—already! Two hours more and I'll be oot five pounds—unless I can accomplish a miracle!" On hands and knees he gathered up the pieces, took another bottle and went feverishly to work.

He worked like a Trojan. He worked like a horse. He worked like a horseful of Trojans.

At two minutes to seven, jaded, bloodshot, but triumphant, he staggered into the saloon. "Hoot!" he cried. "Here I am—and here it is!"

"Eh? Er, oh, yes!" said Captain Ball. "There you are, Mr. Glencannon, there you are, indeed! But, ga-hapf, I mean to say, where are they?—Your trousers, I mean!"

Mr. Glencannon ignored the question. "Here it is, Muster Montgomery! Tak' a look at it!—Aye, tak' a guid look, a five poond look—because that's exackly what it costs ye!"

Mr. Montgomery smirked and rubbed his hands. "Well, well, well!" he said, unctuously, "Wot's this yer've got—a ship in a bottle? Oh, so yer've built a ship in a bottle, 'ave yer? H'm, well, yer've made a ruddy neat job of it, I must say! Captain Ball, I'll thank you please to pay me my winnings!"

"Yere winnings?" scoffed Mr. Glencannon. "Ho, what do ye mean, yere winnings? Hoorns o' the deevil, mon, dinna ye see that it's I—I who have won the bet?"

"—You? Oh, yus? Well, now, please just listen to this!" The Mate opened his notebook, cleared his throat impressively, and read, "'The finished ship must be in an ordinary empty whisky bottle and not some other kind of a bottle with a wide neck'—Now, did yer agree to that or didn't yer? Speak up!"

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"Aye!" said Mr. Glencannon. "O' coorse I did! I not only agreed to it—I've deleevered it!"

"Like 'ell yer 'ave!" cried Mr. Montgomery, victoriously. "That there whisky bottle's not an empty whisky bottle! It's not empty because it's got a ship inside of it! Oh, ho! ho! ho!" he roared, stamping his feet and slapping his thighs. "Oh, good lawks! To think of a canny old bloke like you falling for a simple old gag like that!—Or perhaps I should put it the other way round!"

"What?" Mr. Glencannon swayed against the table and grasped its edge for support. "D-d-d'ye mean to say this whole bet was a deliberate swundle—a cheap play on wurrds?"

"Why, of course it was!—Gor-blyme, I 'ope yer don't think I'm barmy enough to bet with you on the level, do yer?"

"Ho, but this is iniquitous! Captain! Captain Ball, sir!" Mr. Glencannon turned to the shipmaster. "I appeal to ye as referee! I demond fair play! I demond sumple justice! Surely, surely ye dinna mean to stond by and see me victimized, mulcted, robbed by yon nosty, scheming snirk!"

"Well, ga-hapf, her-hem, er, really, now Mr, Glencannon, I really don't see that you have been. No! You agreed to that agreement with your eyes open and you can certainly see with your own eyes now that this bottle isn't empty! Now, is it? Can't you? Ker-huff, I mean to say, no, no, of course it isn't!"

With a plaintive moan, Mr. Glencannon took up the bottle and lurched towards the door, a sick and broken man.

The following day found Mr. Glencannon suffering a severe but natural reaction. As soon as he had managed to choke down his breakfast, he selected a number of magazines from the pile on the sideboard, returned to his room and lay reading in his bunk, belching seismically. The little ship in its bottle reposed upon the dresser opposite. Every time his eye encountered it he shuddered and looked away.

"Ho, ye dom, useless bauble!" he addressed it, finally. "Instead o' making me five pounds the richer, ye've robbed me no' only o' that much cash but o' my priceless health besides!"

He was glumly scanning the pages of *Fawcett's Illustrated Monthly* when his attention was caught by the headlines—

YOUR IDEAS ARE YOUR FORTUNE!

Learn How You Can Earn Big Money
In Your Spare Time—Right In
Your Own Home!

Now, as Mr. Glencannon had confessed to the Reverend Mr.

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McDill, making money was a subject which interested him greatly —nay, it intrigued him, fascinated him, and had been his secondary hobby for more years than he cared to count. Hence, he perused the announcement avidly. It read—

> *Today, as never before, industry is geared up to produce goods and merchandise of all descriptions, in quantities which literally STAGGER the imagination! The greatest problem which confronts the manufacturer is HOW TO SELL these goods. The answer is—ADVERTISING! But successful advertising is built upon CLEVER IDEAS!—Ideas for SLOGANS. Ideas for POSTERS. Ideas for DISPLAYS. IDEAS—IDEAS—IDEAS for all the thousand and one departments of this great, modern selling force! Naturally, these ideas are worth big money—and, whether you realize it or not, YOU HAVE CLEVER IDEAS!*

After a certain amount of rhetorical backing and filling, the advertisement went on to say that merely *HAVING* clever ideas wasn't enough; the trick was to *FIT* the ideas to specific products and then to *SELL THEM.* The signatory revealed himself as not only willing but eager to send, *ABSOLUTELY* post *FREE,* his *BIG NEW BOOK TELLING HOW!* With commendable altruism, all he asked in return was the purely nominal sum of five shillings to help defray the costs of packing, addressing, and handling.

"A-weel," nodded Mr. Glencannon, approvingly, "at five shillings a copy, this grosping bondit has undootedly solved the prublem o' how to mak' money oot o' advertising—as far as he, pairsonally, is concerned. But above and beyond that, there's more than a modicum o' truth in what he says! Aye, losh! When ye think o' all the merchandise produced in cities lik' Birmingham, Monchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and richt here in Glesga, the imogination not only stoggers—it reels, trips, falls, and goes to sleep in the gutter!

"Think, for example, o' the whusky in the great Duggan warehouse, yonder! Think o' the thoosands o' cases o' it noo being stowed in this vurra ship, to be tronsported over the seas to furreign lands where it will have to be sold in competition with cheaper domestic bronds! But, o' coorse, oot yonder, The Dew o' Kirkintilloch ranks as 'imported'—and for some reason there's always a peculiar magic in the wurrd 'imported'. Weel, if Duggan's cud only discover a neat way to symbolize 'imported' they cud . . . Ho! Ha! Great swith!" he leaped from the bunk. "A ship in a

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bottle!—With the Duggan label showing on the backside o' it—and on the inner side o' the label a picture postcard o' Duggan's Warehouse and the Glesga waterfront! Twill look exactly as though the little ship were steaming doon the Clyde!

"And then, on the wooden stand, some slogan lik' *DUGGAN'S DEW—FROM SCOTLAND TO YOU*, or something equally clever! Why, there shud be such a bottle displayed behind every bar in the wurrld—aye, and posters with pictures o' it plostered up on all the hoardings! Hoot, Glencannon, yere foortune's made!"

Some time later, perspiring, breathless, and bearing the paper-wrapped bottle, he was ushered into the office of the Duggan advertising manager, a Mr. Watson. Baring his teeth in a magnetic, salesman's smile and fixing Mr. Watson with a compelling eye, "Guid afternoon, sir!" he declaimed. "Today, as ne'er before, industry is geared up to produce goods and meerchandise in quantities whuch literally *STOGGER* the imogination!" He banged his fist upon the desk. "The greatest prublem o' the monufacturer is *HOW TO SELL* these goods! The onswer is *ADVERTISING!* But successful Advertising is built upon *IDEAS!*—Ideas for . . ."

"Pardon me!" interrupted Mr. Watson, an officious, petulant little man with a pocketful of patent pencils but very little chin. "I've only held down this job for twenty-six years but I fancy I know the fundamentals of advertising. Is there anything else you'd care to talk about?—If not . . ."

"Aye, this!" cried Mr. Glencannon, with a dramatic gesture whisking the paper from the bottle and setting it in its stand on the desk. "This! Look at it, sir! Exomine it! Odmire it! Feast yere eyes on it! It is *THE FINAL SOLUTION O' YERE SALES PRUBLEMS!* Ye can readily see for yersel' what it is, so I willna insoolt yere inteeligence by pointing oot that it's a guid idea—a grond idea—a mognificent idea—a . . ."

Mr. Watson raised his eyebrows. "Yes, yes,—it's all of that! Quite! In fact," he continued drily, "I thought so highly of it when I first saw it, yesterday, that I signed a contract for a thousand of them."

"Eh?" gasped Mr. Glencannon. "W-what's that ye say?"

"What you heard me say. One thousand of them.—At one pound apiece.—To be delivered in time for distribution next Christmas. Eh?—You don't believe me? Well, here's the sample, on which I gave the order." From his desk drawer he produced the bottle—the Reverend Mr. McDill's bottle—which had caused so much torment, turmoil and strife. "There! You can see for yourself that its practically identical with yours, so you needn't

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waste any more time trying to peddle your stolen ideas around here!"

"But—but—ah, foosh, sir! I—I didn't steal the idea! No! It came to me spuntaneously, lik' a flosh in the pan! I was reading an advertisement in an auld mogazine when . . ."

"Of course—in an old magazine! That's exactly how the other fellow thought of it! I don't suppose it was *Fawcett's Illustrated Monthly*, by any chance?"

"Yes!" cried Mr. Glencannon, his fists clenched. "And noo, noo I see it all! And I warn ye that despicht his sonctimoonious monner, his teetotal pretensions and his clerical garb, yon McDill is naught but a smug auld hypocrite!"

"What in the world are you talking about? His name's Montgomery and he's a seafaring chap, like yourself. A bit soberer, perhaps, but . . ."

"Montgomery?" Mr. Glencannon rasped, his rage soaring to new heights, "Montgomery? Ho, so they're in cahoots, then! It's plain as day! Weel, Muster Watson, if you value ye're job, ye'd better be careful! What wud yere Board o' Directors say if they knew that one thoosand poonds o' Mackenzie Duggan and Company's guid money was being honded ower to the International League o' Militant Teetotallers—to be used in their compaign to put this and every other distillery oot o' business?"

"You mean to say . . ."

"Exockly! I mean that auld snivelling McDill is Chairmon o' its Glesga Council—and that yere odious friend Montgomery is one of its leading lichts!"

"Oh, good heavens!" Mr. Watson paled. "If—if what you say is true I—er, well, I'm afraid I'd find myself in a most embarrassing position with our Directors! The League has caused us a great deal of trouble, there's no denying it. But—what can I do? I've signed the contract!"

"Dinna let that worrit ye! I'll see that ye're released—provided, o' coorse, that ye'll buy the bottles from me under the same terms. I'll guarantee the wurrk will be a dom sicht better than either o' these somples!"

"Will you?—Will you? Ah, well," and Mr. Watson was evidently much relieved, "under those conditions, I'd certainly be happy to do business with you!"

"Guid!" said Mr. Glencannon, snatching up his cap. "I'll be back to see ye later!"

"Ah!" The Reverend Mr. Clarence McDill looked up from the sermon he was preparing and beamed in surprise and welcome. "Ah! A very good day to you, sir! Do you know, I was planning to make another call on you? You see, ah, we have just finished

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five dozen more of those beautiful hand-woven face cloths that you were kind enough to admire and . . ."

"Keep them!" thundered Mr. Glencannon. "Use them to wash yere black heart with—if ye can reach doon far enough to reach it! Shame on ye! Aye, fie and for shame on ye and Montgomery and all yere League o' so-called Teetotallers!—Accept a thoosand poonds to advertise the hell brew o' the biggest distillers in Scotland, wud ye? Foosh, what a howling scondrol!"

"But—my dear sir!—What's all this? Come, come, calm yourself!—I assure you that you've been sadly misinformed!—A thousand pounds?—From distillers? Never! Never! Faugh, fellow, you don't know what you're saying!"

"I do! I'm saying that Montgomery has got ye an order for a thoosand ships in bottles from Mackenzie Duggan and Company, Limited—and what's more I can prove it!"

"From—from Mackenzie Duggan and Company? From those—those poisoners? Ridiculous! Mr. Montgomery got the order from one of the big department stores for delivery late next autumn!"

"Pairhops that's what he told ye, but I'm telling ye different! If ye dinna believe me, ye've the telephone there at yere elbow! Call Muster Watson, Duggan's advertising mon!—Call Major Duggan himsel'! Osk them!—I dare ye!"

The Reverend Mr. McDill gasped and wilted in his chair. "I—I'm dazed!" he said, and he looked it. "I—I—Oh, good heavens! This must not, this cannot be! But—I understand that there's a formal, binding contract which . . ."

"Contract? Foosh to the contract!" said Mr. Glencannon, reassuringly. "Indeed, sir, noo that I realize, as I shud have realized from the ootset, that ye've been misled by a scoondrel, I'll mak' it my duty to see that ye come off free and clear o' law suits and all such. I beg o' ye to accept my most hoomble apologies. But just what are the terms o' the agreement?"

"Well," Mr. McDill mopped his bald spot, "Mr. Montgomery said that the store would pay only ten shillings apiece for them. As they cost us seven to make, it didn't leave us much of a profit. But because the Mavisbank Home is so sorely in need of funds, even . . ."

"There! Pray say no more, sir! I not only guarantee to foorce yon dom distiller to tear up the contract but I'll see that ye dinna lose a penny on this whole tronsaction! Look! I'll write ye oot my pairsonal cheque, richt here and noo, for a hoonderd and fufty poonds—the exoct sum ye'd have earned to help support yere chorities if the thing had gone through. There!"

"But my dear—er, Mr. Glencannon!—You overwhelm me! My gratitude is heartfelt and beyond my poor words to express!

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Can I depend upon you to join me in exposing this Montgomery—this Judas, this, this monster—to the High Council of our League? Can I count upon your testimony, that he may be scourged with rods, humiliated and cast forth?"

"A-weel, fronkly, no," said Mr. Glencannon. "Much as I'd relish being there to applaud the spectacle and to lead in an appropriate hymn or two, ye'll have to monnage that part by yersel'. Ye see, despicht my sympathy with yere great crusade, I'm not a meember o' the League. After lang meditation, I finally concluded that I cud do more to abolish liquor, wurrking as a free lance, than I cud if I were affiliated with any o' the teemperance organizations."

"Well, sir!" The clergyman's voice broke as he wrung his benefactor's hand. "You've struck a lusty blow for us, today!"

"Aye, and I'll strike many another in the vurra near future, never fear!" Mr. Glencannon assured him as he took his leave.

On his way back to Duggan's Warehouse, "Weel, noo, let's see!" he mused. "As soon as Muster Watson signs the contract, I'll cable Chiang Foo and Company to get started making the parts for the ships. In view o' the size o' the order and the fact that I'll furnish Chiang Foo with the bottles when I get to Hong Kong, I'll offer him four shillings apiece. Weel, let's say three shillings. So e'en with the hoonderd and fufty poonds I've just noo donated to the Reeverend Muster McDill's auld sailors, I'll come oot o' the deal with a profit o' seeven hoonderd quid.

"But no!" his face fell, "No! I'd almost forgotten that five poond bet I lost to Montgomery!—A-weel, never mind, never mind! Before he loses his job and is thrown into jail for stealing that whusky I'm plonning to steal oot o' No 3 hold, I'll get square with the dom crook somehow!"

* * *

THE FALL

Sir John Lavery, the famous painter, told of an old Scottish gardener who was taken to see an exhibition of pictures in London. The old man intently surveyed one picture labelled "The Fall!" and remained staring until asked what he thought of it.

"I think no great things of it," he said. "Why sir, Eve is tempting Adam wi' an apple of a variety that wasna known till aboot twenty years ago."

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SOME OTHER STAR

A new-born babe and nothing more, or—who can tell?—a future prophet, priest, or king

by GERALD KERSH

"WHEN you travel alone over those plains," said the dealer in perfumes, "it is just as well to take a few reliable men along with you. A couple of strong slaves armed with clubs are better than nothing. Me, I should never dream of setting out without a good sharp sword at my side, and a well-sharpened dagger up my sleeve, and a little escort of armed horsemen . . . say three or four. Only the other week we had a brush with bandits on a lonely road. But—"

"Excuse me," said his host, and left the room. He returned five minutes later, wringing his hands. "If only she comes through this all right . . . My God, if only she does . . ."

The dealer in perfumes smiled indulgently and said, "Have no fear. I was just the same when my first child was born; nervous, excitable. She is young and healthy. You have a good midwife. You are a decent man—you say your prayers, bless God at the prescribed times, and do your duty. Don't worry. Be thankful, rather, that your wife has a sound roof over her and a comfortable bed to lie in."

"If, please God, it is a son, I shall name him after my father, may his soul rest in peace."

"Please God it will be a son. And if it is a daughter, then be thankful just the same. A good woman is above rubies. This is a propitious time for a birth of any kind, let me assure you. Did I tell you what happened exactly a year ago tonight? Sit still; keep calm; listen, and take your mind off things for a few minutes.

"You know that I get about a good deal and know what is going on in the world. So, let me tell you about this time last year."

From a remote part of the house there sounded a short, sharp cry—a woman's cry. The young man stopped his ears.

"I was travelling," said the dealer in perfumes, "to Bethlehem, where I had some little business to transact with a Roman official . . . may worms eat him! The roads were choked with traffic. The population was on the move. Caesar—may he be covered with boils from head to foot!—was taking a census. So we progressed very slowly, for there were thousands of people. At one point I nearly ran

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down a man and his wife, travelling at less than a slow foot-pace on the edge of the road—an old man and a young wife. I couldn't see her face; it was veiled, but she was riding on a poor old donkey, and it was easy to see that she was very near her time, poor girl.

"I made room for them on the road, since it is my custom to be civil to everyone. The old man thanked me very humbly, and led the donkey past. I saw how hopeless it was to try and make progress just then, so I paused, with my little bodyguard, by the side of the road, and sat down to rest and eat and drink a little, since it is my custom never to move a mile without a supply of food and wine.

"It was a clear evening. My men made a little fire. I was prepared to spend the night there, if necessary; since it is my custom always to be prepared with furs and rugs for such emergencies. Good. I was resting there by the little fire when I heard footsteps approaching. My men drew their swords, and cried, 'Who is there?' A voice, speaking with a distinctly outlandish accent, said: 'Friends,' and an extremely queer-looking man came into the firelight. He was, I think, an Egyptian, very richly dressed. It is my custom to notice such things, and I can tell you that his robe alone, sold for half of what he paid for it, would have kept a family in comfort for five years. There were two others behind him—one very pale and the other very dark—not servants, but men like the Egyptian: men of substance, with an air of authority.

"The Egyptian spoke without ceremony. He said: 'You are known as Jochanaan the Perfumer.' I said: 'At your service, my lord. How did you know?' He replied: 'It does not matter. We wish to purchase perfumes.' I said: 'Only too pleased. Wait just one little moment, and I'll show you some very rare articles, gentlemen, at the most advantageous prices . . .' Well, the long and short of it was that they bought a casket of the finest myrrh, another of the purest frankincense, and a quantity of cassia in an antique jar—without a word, mark you, without a word of argument over the prices—and paid in good Roman gold coin, and turned to go.

"But just before he went, the Egyptian—at least, I think he was an Egyptian—laid a hand on my arm and said, 'Your perfumes, my friend, are for the cradle of a King who is more than a King.' 'And who may he be?' I asked, and he replied: 'He will be born this night.' 'Where?' The Egyptian said nothing but pointed towards Bethlehem, and looked me full in the face in such a way that I felt suddenly uneasy in my inside. Then they went away towards the town, and I spent the rest of the night by the fire, thinking odd thoughts. There was a strange star in the sky that night. It burned after dawn, bright as oil.

"By the morning I was ready to go on. 'King,' I said, and laughed; then I tested the strangers' money with my teeth, just to

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make sure. It was quite all right. And so I went into Bethlehem and did my little stroke of business. And then I heard the news.

"It appears that the old man with the young wife was a carpenter called Joseph, of the house of David. He couldn't get rooms in the town, and thought himself pretty lucky to find a stable for the night. And there his wife gave birth to a son. Well, imagine his surprise when, just after the baby was washed, my three strangers came in, and fell on their knees, and laid before the new-born infant the very perfumes they had bought from me the same night. It seems that they had some sign, some omen, some warning, that a Prophet—some say the Messiah—was to be born in such-and-such a place. And the star I saw had travelled in front of them, leading them to the spot. So there you are, my young friend: it only goes to show.

"To most people, a new-born babe is a new-born babe, and nothing more; but that same child may be a prophet, a priest, or a king. So who can tell? The good God may have reserved something special for your first-born, also. Have no fear, therefore. Drink a cup of wine."

There was silence for a while. Suddenly the young man leapt to his feet, ran to the door, and listened. The dealer in perfumes, listening also, heard the thin, clear, indefinably woeful wail of a baby forcing out its first breath of air.

The midwife entered. "Good luck!" she said. "You have a fine, strong son. And your wife is as well as I am."

The young man burst into tears of joy and cried, "Thank God! Praise God!"

"What did I tell you?" said the dealer in perfumes, smiling with an air of personal accomplishment.

The young man said: "I shall name him after my father, may his soul rest in peace. I shall call him Judas."

"Simon Iscariot, accept my congratulations," said the dealer in perfumes.

* * *

CHRISTMAS CRADLE SONG

O my deir hert, young Jesus sweit,
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee in my hert
And never mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee evermoir,
With sangis sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow!

Author Unknown, Sixteenth Century

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DON'T LOOK NOW!

When the moon is down, and midnight tolls—

Better to see your cheek grown hollow,
Better to see your temple worn,
Than to forget to follow, follow,
After the sound of a silver horn.

Better to bind your brow with willow
And follow, follow until you die,
Than to sleep with your head on a golden pillow,
Nor lift it up when the hunt goes by.

Better to see your cheek grown sallow
And your hair grown gray, so soon, so soon,
Than to forget to hallo, hallo,
After the milk-white hounds of the moon.

ELINOR WYLIE, 1885-1928

So Affected

I dreamed that somebody was dead. I don't know who, but it's not to the purpose. It was a private gentleman, and a particular friend; and I was greatly overcome when the news was broken to me (very delicately) by a gentleman in a cocked hat, top boots, and a sheet. Nothing else. "Good God!" I said, "is he dead?" "He is as dead, sir," rejoined the gentleman, "as a door-nail. But we must all die, Mr. Dickens, sooner or later, my dear sir." "Ah!" I said. "Yes, to be sure. Very true. But what did he die of?" The gentleman burst into a flood of tears, and said, in a voice broken by emotion, "He christened his youngest child, sir, with a toasting-fork." I never in my life was so affected.

CHARLES DICKENS, *in a letter, 1st Sept.* 1843

Symptoms

A footstep, a low throbbing in the walls,
A noise of falling weights that never fell,
Weird whispers, bells that rang without a hand,
Door-handles turn'd when none was at the door . . .

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON, 1809-92

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First Catch Your Ghost

If, during the time of an apparition, there is a lighted candle in the room, it will burn extremely blue; this is so universally acknowledged, that many eminent philosophers have busied themselves in accounting for it, without once doubting the truth of the fact. Dogs, too, have the faculty of seeing spirits; but in that case they usually show signs of terror, by whining and creeping to their masters for protection: and it is generally supposed that they often see things of this nature when their owners cannot; there being some persons, especially those born on a Christmas Eve, who cannot see spirits.

The coming of a spirit is announced some time before its appearance by a variety of loud and dreadful noises; sometimes rattling in the old hall like a coach and six, and rumbling up and down the staircase like the trundling of bowls or cannon-balls. At length the door flies open, and the spectre stalks slowly up to the bed's-foot, and opening the curtains, looks steadfastly at the person in bed by whom it is seen; a ghost being very rarely visible to more than one person, although there are several in company. It is here necessary to observe that it has been universally found by experience, as well as affirmed by divers apparitions themselves, that a ghost has not the power to speak till it has been first spoken to; so that, notwithstanding the urgency of the business on which it may come, everything must stand still till the person visited can find sufficient courage to speak to it: an event that sometimes does not take place for many years . . .

FRANCIS GROSE, 1731-1791

The Ride-by-Nights

Up on their brooms the Witches stream,
Crooked and black in the crescent's gleam;
One foot high, and one foot low,
Bearded, cloaked, and cowled they go.
'Neath Charlie's Wain they twitter and tweet,
And away they swarm 'neath the Dragon's feet.
With a whoop and a flutter they swing and sway,
And surge pell-mell down the Milky Way.
Betwixt the legs of the glittering Chair
They hover and squeak in the empty air.
Then round they swoop past the glimmering Lion
To where Sirius barks behind huge Orion;
Up, then, and over to wheel amain,
Under the silver, and home again.

WALTER DE LA MARE

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Apparition

At these words his wife, who had in vain laid her hand upon his, and looked him with dreary earnestness in the face, suddenly glided from the room. He, and two or three who were present, were struck with horror. They said she did not walk out, nor vanish suddenly, but glided, as one who could dispense with the use of feet . . .

Following, they addressed her, but received no answer. They stepped gently towards her, and still received none. At last one of them went round in front, and instantly fell to the floor. For the figure was without body. A hollow hood was left instead of a face. The clothes were standing upright by themselves.

LEIGH HUNT, 1784-1859

Stroke of Twelve

. . . Now it is the time of night
That the graves all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the churchway paths to glide :
And we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic ; not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallowed house :
I am sent with broom before,
To sweep the dust behind the door.

Through the house give glimmering light,
By the dead and drowsy fire ;
Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from brier ;
And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it, trippingly.
First rehearse your song by rote,
To each word a warbling note :
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
Will we sing, and bless this place.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Comfort Ye

Ghosts, like ladies, never speak till spoke to.

R. H. BARHAM, 1788-1845

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★*The adventures of Gawain are as old as myth. Sung by the troubadours, or told by the court poets as an endless serial for milady's diversion when milord was away to the wars, they were crystallized finally in the alliterative verse of an unknown fourteenth century poet.*

French, Irish and Welsh folk lore all claim Sir Gawain for their own. "Gay, gratious and gude," he is a knight par excellence, and many believe that he, and not Sir Percival or Sir Galahad, sought and won the Holy Grail.

In this freely adapted translation from the original Middle English text we have a Christmas story in the old and true tradition.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Translated by

HILARY NICHOLSON

MANY long years ago, there dwelt in Britain a king called Arthur, the noblest of his kind, of whom many strange stories are told.

But the most amazing adventure that ever befell him happened one Christmas, when the king was at Camelot, holding high revel with his knights, that celebrated brotherhood of the Round Table. For fully fifteen days the festivities had been going on among the lords and ladies of the Court, in the halls and the bowers, with jousting and gallant sports by day, and dancing and carefree merry-making far into the night. Until at last the New Year dawned, and the king gave a great banquet to celebrate the occasion.

At the high table in the centre of the dais sat the lovely Guenevere most splendidly gowned, and over her head a canopy of rich scarlet silk of Toulouse, with jewelled tapestries and cloth of gold. And by her side stood King Arthur, waiting courteously for everyone to be served before taking his seat. He waited, too, for a certain custom to be observed which he himself had devised. This decreed that on any great court festival, such as this, he would never sit down to eat until there had been related to him some tale of high adventure ; or until one knight sought out another of his gallant company to meet him in arms, staking life against life, and allowing each other the vantage, as Fortune might ordain.

So he stood there at the high table, chatting merrily to Gawain,

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who sat beside the Queen, and to Agravin *à la dure main*, both of them his nephews and very trusty knights, when suddenly a fanfare of trumpets, followed by the roll of kettledrums and the shrill music of the pipes announced the arrival of the first course, and the sign was given for the feast to begin. But the notes had scarcely died away when, without warning, there rode in at the door a terrible knight, the greatest in all the world in his full stature.

From his neck to his waist he was so thick-set and muscular, and his limbs and his flanks were so long and so huge, that he looked for all the world a giant! But well-proportioned and shapely in spite of his terrifying appearance. And as he advanced boldly into the hall all the knights stared at him in amazement.

For the terrible stranger was bright green all over!

His clothes and his armour were all of green too. The close-fitting tunic and fur-trimmed cloak, with its matching hood flung back—all were the same vivid green. So were his close-fitting hose, and his shoes in the stirrups were shod with green leather, while his spurs were of shining green gold. Even his long, waving hair was green, and the great beard that fell to his chest.

He rode a huge green horse that moved restlessly in its green-embroidered bridle and gay trappings, all crusted over with precious stones. He was well matched with his rider.

None of the knights there had ever witnessed such a sight before, and they gazed at him in wonder. For it seemed to them that if it came to fighting, there was no man in the world who might withstand him.

However he had neither helmet nor hawberk, and carried neither lance nor shield. But in one hand he held a holly branch, which is deepest green when the thickets are bare, and in the other a monstrous battle-axe with a cruel spike. The head was over three feet long together with the spike, and forged entirely of green steel and beaten gold, while the shining blade itself, with its broad cutting edge, was fashioned to cleave as clean as a razor.

The knight gripped the stout haft, all carved with intricate green designs, and ornamented with tassels, and advanced fearlessly to the dais. He greeted no one directly, but looked them over contemptuously from his superior height. At last he spoke:

"Where is the king of this castle? For it is he that I have come to see, and no other." And he swaggered up and down, while he scanned the whole assembly, and they gazed at him, astonished, wondering whatever this marvel might portend, and waiting to see what he would do next.

Some of them edged closer to watch, but many were convinced he must be a ghost, or some genie called up by a magician, so they were afraid to answer him. As if they had every one fallen asleep,

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their voices were hushed suddenly throughout the great hall. Though their silence was not entirely induced by fear; for some by way of courtesy left it to their king to answer him.

Then Arthur, who had witnessed the whole affair from the dais, came forward courteously and greeted the strange knight, for he was not in the least put out.

"I am King Arthur, the lord of this castle, and you are most welcome here, Sir Knight. I beg of you, dismount, and be our guest, and later we will hear of your errand."

"No!" the Green Knight answered him promptly. "God knows it was not my intention to stay long in your castle. Indeed my purpose was quite different. It is your own renown that has brought me here; for I have heard wherever I go that your knights are the best, the boldest in arms and most valiant of all men on earth to contend with. So I have come—though you may be assured by this branch I carry that I come in peace. Had I indeed intended hostility, I should have come equipped, for I have many weapons at home, and am skilled in their handling. And now, if you are as bold as all men say, you will grant me freely the favour I ask."

"If it is unarmed combat that you require," promised the king, "we can find you a man, never fear."

But the Green Knight replied quickly, "Truly, sir, I seek no fight. What's more, these knights you have here are but beardless boys compared with me! If I were buckled in my armour, astride my great war horse, there is none here who could match me. Their strength is too feeble. No! All I ask of you here is a Christmas game, for this is the season for such diversions, and here are many young knights. Now if any man here is valiant or hot-blooded enough to venture boldly and exchange one blow for another, I will give him this splendid battle axe as a gift. And I myself will endure the first blow, willingly, all unarmed as I am now. If any man would test the truth of my words, let him step forward quickly and take this axe. I renounce my claim to it for ever. But in return for the blow which I accept from him here and now, I demand that you grant me the right of dealing him another—though I allow him respite of a twelvemonth and a day. Now let us see if any man here dares offer!"

If they were astonished when the Green Knight first rode into the hall, they were entirely dumbfounded by his surprising proposition, and no one uttered a word—while the Knight turned this way and that in his saddle, and his eyes roved fiercely about, awaiting an answer. But when the silence continued he gave a derisive cough, and drawing himself to his full height, addressed them with insolent words:

"What!" cried he. "And is this Arthur's house, whose fame is spread throughout so many kingdoms? Where now then is your

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boldness and your pride ? Why, in one single challenging word the glorious legend of the Round Table has been overthrown, and you all cower in fear before a blow has been struck ! "

And he laughed so scornfully that King Arthur flushed with anger at the insult and the shame his charge implied. He strode forward, impetuously, to meet his challenger.

" Heaven knows," he exclaimed furiously, " your request is foolish enough, Sir Knight, but since it is folly you seek, let the responsibility be yours. There is not a man here who is afraid of your boasting words. Now, give me your battle-axe, for God's sake, and I myself will settle this business ! "

Then he seized the axe by the handle while the other dismounted, and swung the weapon grimly this way and that as he tested its weight. The Green Knight towering head and shoulders above the king, stood there grimly stroking his beard. Not a muscle of his stern face moved as he straightened his coat, no more daunted or dismayed at the blow that was coming than if any knight along the benches there had offered him a goblet of wine.

Then Gawain, who was sitting beside the Queen, leaned forward and spoke to the king :

" I pray you, my lord, let this combat be mine. Bid me rise from my seat and come to you, so that without discourtesy to my Sovereign Lady, I may leave the table and take counsel with you before all this noble company.

" For indeed when such a challenge is issued so openly in your presence, it does not seem fitting that you yourself should have to take it up, however eager you may be to do so, when so many of your own knights are sitting around you on the benches. And I am sure there are none more warlike in temper, under heaven. I know full well that I am the weakest of them, and the feeblest of wit, and but for the fact that you are my uncle, insignificant. The loss of my life would therefore be of small consequence. Besides this business is too foolish and undignified for a king. I pray you grant it to me, since I have asked for it first. If I have spoken discourteously, I leave it to this company to decide."

Then the knights whispered together, and were all of one mind that King Arthur should be relieved of the challenge and the sport be given to Gawain.

Then the king bade Gawain rise from the table, and he came promptly and knelt before the king, and grasped the axe, while King Arthur gave him God's blessing.

" Take care, cousin," said the king, " how you set about your hewing. For if you direct your blow aright, I am convinced you will have to wait a long time for the blow he must deal you in return ! "

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Then Gawain went boldly to the Green Knight, with the battle-axe in his hand, and the other awaited him calmly. "Let us restate our agreement," he said, "before we proceed further with this business. First, I entreat you sir, tell me truly, what is your name?"

"Upon my honour," said the good knight, "I am called Gawain, and I offer you this blow, whatever the outcome, on the understanding that a year from today you shall deal me another in return with whatever weapon you please—you, and no other person alive!"

Then the Green Knight said, "Upon my word, Sir Gawain, I am exceedingly glad it is your hand that will strike this blow. You have repeated the whole covenant I asked of the king exactly and without delay. But promise me further, on your oath as a true knight, that at the year's end you yourself will seek me out, wheresoever on earth you think I may be found, and accept such payment for yourself as you deal me here today, in the presence of this noble company."

"Where shall I find you?" asked Sir Gawain. "Where do you live? God knows I have no knowledge of your habitation, or of you or your Court, Sir Knight. But direct me honestly, and tell me what you are called, and I will use all the skill I possess to find my way there. This I swear on my honour as a true knight!"

"That is enough at the New Year," said the Green Knight. "And if I tell you all this after I have received your knock it will suffice, and you may keep your tryst. If I am unable to speak, that will be all the better for you, for then you can stay in your own land and seek no further. But enough of talking! Take your grim weapon in your hand and let us see your prowess with the axe!"

"Gladly, Sir Knight," agreed Gawain, and he stroked the blade, while the Green Knight promptly took up his stand and bent his head forward a little. His wonderful long hair was swept over the crown of his head leaving the naked flesh of his neck ready for the stroke.

Then Gawain gripped the axe and swung it aloft, setting his left foot forward to balance himself and he brought the sharp blade down swiftly so that the steel penetrated the fair flesh, severing the neck in two with such force that the axe bit deep into the ground. The head rolled forward against the feet of those nearest, and the blood spurted from the headless trunk.

But to everyone's amazement the Green Knight neither staggered nor fell. Quite undismayed he sprang forward to recover his head; then he turned to his horse, gathered up the reins, and setting foot to the stirrup swung himself to the saddle. And there he sat, calmly holding his severed head by the hair, as if nothing whatever were amiss.

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With sudden horror the significance of his terrible bargain dawned on the knights.

Then the Green Knight turned the gruesome head so that it faced the Queen at the high table, and then the rest of the knights in turn. The eyelids fluttered and the eyes stared wide, while the mouth spoke as follows :

" See to it, Sir Gawain, that you are ready at the appointed time, and seek faithfully until you find me, as you have sworn to do in the hearing of all these knights. Make your way, I charge you, to the Green Chapel, to receive just such another blow as you have dealt me here—and well you deserve it—which I will repay promptly next New Year's morning. For I am well known as the Knight of the Green Chapel, and if you seek diligently to find me, you cannot fail. Come, therefore, or be branded a coward for evermore ! "

With that he gave a mighty roar, wheeled his horse and galloped out of the hall, his head swinging from his hand. But to what land he went, no one there could tell, any more than they knew whence he had come.

Then the king and Gawain looked sheepishly at each other and laughed with relief to see the end of the strange affair, at least for the time being. And though Arthur knew consternation in his heart, he kept it from the Queen, and said gently, " Do not be perturbed, dear heart. It was no more than a Christmas diversion. Come, let us eat, for my wish has been fulfilled. This was a marvel indeed ! "

Then he smiled at Gawain and said to him jokingly, " Now Sir Knight, put away your axe. It has surely done enough for one day ! "

And it was hung against a great wall tapestry, where everyone might see it, and talk of the strange affair from time to time. So with banqueting and festivity the day came to an end.

But though men are gay, and strong wine gladdens the heart, a year passes quickly. And the time soon came round when Gawain must set out on his quest. On All Saints' Day, therefore, he sought out the king and begged leave to depart, and Arthur gave a great feast in his honour. Then he was buckled into his splendid armour, and his war horse, Gringolet, was saddled. His shield with its heraldic device of the pentangle was brought to him, and after hearing Mass in chapel, he took leave of his sorrowing friends. Then setting spurs to Gringolet, he rode away, he knew not whither.

On and on he went, with God alone to guide him, asking everyone he met if anyone had heard tell of a green knight thereabouts, or of a green chapel. But they all said, " No,"—that never in their lives had they seen a man of such a colour as green !

Thus wandered Sir Gawain by many strange ways, over dreary hillsides and steep cliff paths. Sometimes he fought with dragons,

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sometimes with wolves, or the fierce trolls that lived among the crags. Bears pursued him often, and huge giants puffed after him from the beetling rocks. A less courageous knight would have perished many times over!

But worst of all the hardships he had to endure was the wintry weather, when the cold clear rain fell from the skies, and froze into hail before it touched the earth. For more nights than he cared to recall he had slept in his armour among the bare rocks, half dead with cold, while the mountain stream, cascading from the summit, froze over his head in icicles.

On the morning of Christmas Eve he was riding along a hillside into a deep forest, wondering how he might keep the solemn festival aright. And as he rode he prayed and after confessing his sins, made the sign of the cross, saying, "May the cross of Christ be my help!"

Hardly had he crossed himself three times when he saw through the trees below him a fine castle, enclosed by a moat that gleamed through the frosty oaks. It looked just like a model cut out of paper. Reverently he took off his helmet and thanked God and St. Julian. Then spurring Gringolet, he made his way towards the drawbridge. As he approached it was drawn up with a clatter. But he halted on the brink and called across the water, asking that he might be allowed to enter the castle and take shelter with them for the season of Christmas.

A courteous porter appeared promptly and promised to take his message to the lord. "But I am sure, Sir Knight," he said, "that you will be welcome to stay with my master as long as you will."

Then the drawbridge was let down, and the knights and squires came forth from the castle to greet Sir Gawain and bring him into the hall. And they all crowded round him, helping him off with his armour, and stabling his horse.

Their lord came forward to welcome him, a huge man, with a ruddy complexion and a reddish-brown beard. He promptly gave orders that a splendid room be made ready for the knight, and that handsome clothes be brought to him to change into. And after Sir Gawain had washed and eaten they asked him his name, and whence he had come. And everyone there, especially the host, was delighted to hear it was the noble Gawain they entertained in their midst. "For Sir Gawain," they said to each other, "is the prince of courtly behaviour, and we may learn much by observing his ways."

When night fell the bells pealed for chapel, and the lord of the castle invited Gawain to sit beside him in his own pew. And after the service the lady of the castle, with all her fair attendants, asked that the knight be presented to her. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever met, lovelier even than Guenevere, and at her

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side walked an aged crone. Sir Gawain bowed low to the elder, but the fair lady he caught for a moment in his arms, and kissed her chivalrously.

The two ladies made a strange contrast, the younger with her fresh, young beauty, her smooth cheeks and snowy bosom decked with lustrous pearls; the other thick-set and swarthy, her face and throat muffled in heavy veils.

They took him back to the castle and entertained him royally until he went to his bed. And the next day being Christmas there was great festivity and merrymaking, and they kept up their revelling for two days after, Sir Gawain and the lady spending much time together.

But on the last evening the lord took Sir Gawain aside and after thanking him for the favour he had done him by spending Christmas in his castle, he begged the knight to stay longer. Then Gawain declined courteously, and by way of excuse he told the lord all of his errand, of his tryst with the Green Knight at the Green Chapel which he had yet to find.

"So you see, Sir Knight," he ended, "I must be on my way, for I have barely three days left to me, and I would rather die than fail in my quest!"

Then the lord laughed heartily. "Now you must certainly stay," he said. "For the Green Chapel is no great distance from here. Stay with me until New Year's day and then rise up and depart. I will give you one of my own men to guide you."

Gawain was very glad indeed to hear this and readily agreed to stay. "For," said he, "since my venture is all but achieved, I am entirely at your service in the meantime, to order as you please."

Then the lord called the ladies and told them the news, and they prepared to renew the merrymaking. "But first," said the lord, "will you make me a promise, Sir Gawain? You have had a long and weary journey, and have taken little rest since you arrived. Will you stay in your room tomorrow, and sleep until Mass, and my wife shall entertain you until I come home from my hunting?"

"Gladly!" agreed Sir Gawain.

"Further," said the lord, "let us make a covenant. Whatever game I kill in the forest I will present to you, and whatever fortune, good or bad, that you come by here, you shall yield me in exchange!"

"Before God," said Sir Gawain, "I will do it, for it sounds most diverting."

"And now," said the other, "some wine! Let us drink to our bargain!"

Early the next morning the Christmas guests left the castle, and the lord with his knights rode out into the forest to hunt the deer.

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Meanwhile Sir Gawain lay snugly in his soft bed. And as he dozed lightly he became conscious of a soft movement at his door, and suddenly it opened.

Gawain lifted a corner of the bedcurtain and peered cautiously out to see what this might be. It was the lady of the castle! Softly she closed the door and stealthily crept towards the bed.

Gawain did not know quite what to do, so he lay down again craftily, and pretended he was still asleep. Noiselessly she drew aside the bed curtain, and stepping inside, seated herself gently on the edge of the bed. Then she waited for him to wake.

Sir Gawain lay low for some time, wondering what this might mean, for it seemed to him very odd. At last he said to himself, "Perhaps it would be better to find out right away what it is that she wants." So he stretched and yawned, and opening his eyes pretended to be astonished to find her sitting there.

"Good morning, Sir Gawain," she greeted him gaily. "You are an unwary sleeper. Now you are caught, and unless we can arrange a truce, I shall imprison you here in your bed, you can be sure of that!" And she laughed merrily.

"Then I am well content," said Gawain, cheerfully, "and surrender promptly, since there is no way out. But one favour I beg of you. Would you please release your prisoner long enough for him to rise and get dressed? Then we could talk more easily!"

"Indeed no," said the lady. "You must not get up. Besides, I have a better idea. I shall hold you here and talk to my captive knight. For here we are, by our two selves and the door is tightly shut. My lord and his men are far away, hunting, and everyone else is still in bed. Since I have under my roof the world's favourite knight, I must make the most of my time. Come, take me to you, for I am yours entirely!"

"Fair lady," parried Gawain, "I am unworthy of such honour as you do me. But I am here at your bidding, to do whatever you will."

"In good faith, Sir Gawain," said the lady sweetly, "to disbelieve you would be discourteous, and there are ladies enough who would give all they possess to have you in their power, as I have, and to talk to you like this. I am grateful to God for this opportunity."

"Madame," suggested the courteous Gawain, "you are truly generous, but I think you follow the courtly convention perhaps too sincerely."

"Indeed, no!" exclaimed the lady, vehemently. "Far from it, for were I the most beautiful and the noblest woman alive, of all men on earth I would choose you for my lover. And now all I have ever heard of you I know to be true!"

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" My noble lady," exclaimed the knight, " you could have chosen much better, but I am exceedingly proud of your high estimation. I offer myself in your service, to be your true knight, and may Christ reward you."

Thus they dallied and fenced with words until noon, the lady behaving as if she loved him dearly, and the knight going warily, though with perfect courtesy. So that the lady thought to herself, " Lovemaking is no part of his plan," and she remembered the grim task that lay before him, and the fateful stroke that could not be escaped.

When she spoke of leaving him he made no move to prevent her. But as she wished him goodbye, she paused a moment, and smiling down at him she said in a tone of mock reproof: " I am beginning to doubt whether you are really Sir Gawain, and not an imposter. For the true Gawain would never have let a lady go without claiming at least a kiss ! "

" Madame," said Gawain, fearing he had been guilty of discourtesy, " indeed I will kiss you, if that is what pleases you ! "

At that she came to him promptly, and bending over him, put her arms about him and kissed him sweetly. Then opening the door softly, she tiptoed out.

Gawain rose hastily and dressed, and after Mass they made merry all day until the lord returned from his hunting. He greeted Gawain at once and called all the company into the hall to witness the exchange.

" Have I not done well, Sir Knight ? " he inquired. " And it is all yours ! "

" The same goes for me," answered Gawain. " All I have come by this day I now make over to you." And he embraced the lord and kissed him as graciously as he knew how.

" Upon my word," said his host, " I think your sport is even more profitable than mine. Pray tell me how you came by it, sir ? "

" That was not in the agreement," answered Sir Gawain, gaily. " You have had what is due to you. Pray be satisfied ! " And jesting they went in to supper, pledging themselves to continue the covenant on the next day as well.

So while the lord and his huntsmen pursued the wild boar in the thickets, Gawain lay at his ease. And before very long the lady came to his bedside to try once more to shake his resolve. Softly she chided him: " Already, Sir Knight, you have forgotten all that I taught you yesterday, though it was plain enough in all truth ! "

" And what was that ? " inquired Gawain, courteously, though knowing full well.

" I gave you a lesson in the art of kissing," said the lady, " and

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how to claim further favours when they are plainly offered to you."

"Dear lady," said the knight, "I feared to make such a request lest I be refused!"

"You would never be refused," she assured him, "and even if you were, you are strong enough, surely, to take what you want, whether I willed it or no!"

"That," agreed Gawain, "is true enough. But in the land that I come from, we regard such gifts as unprofitable when yielded unwillingly. But I am here at your bidding, to kiss as you please."

Then the lady leaned down and gently kissed the knight, and they flirted lightheartedly, until at last she said, "Do not be angry, Sir Knight, but there is something I must ask of you. How is it that you, the most famous of all knights, and the most practised in the arts of both love and war, have never uttered one word of love to me here, though I have come to you twice? Surely you who are so courteous, should be ready to instruct one so anxious to learn something of the sport of love! Are you afraid, perhaps, you would find me dull, or too stupid to learn? Shame on you, Sir Gawain! Pray give me my lesson!"

"In good faith," answered the knight, "I am poorly equipped to teach *you* anything about making love! You have already twice my skill in that art! But I will do all in my power, and may God help me."

Thus the lady teased and tempted him to do wrong, but he kept her at a distance most skilfully, so that he never appeared discourteous or impolite. Until at last she kissed him and took her leave.

That night again the lord and Sir Gawain exchanged their winnings, and in return for the carcass of a huge, fierce boar, Gawain handed on the kiss he had received from the lady. But at the feasting that followed the lady so tempted the knight with whispers of love and teasing side glances that he began to feel he could not keep himself at a distance much longer, whatever the outcome.

Before they retired to bed, therefore, he approached his host and begged leave to set out the next morning to seek the Green Chapel. But the lord restrained him, and begged him to stay just the one more day. "For," said he, "I have given you my word to bring you to that place at daybreak on New Year's morning. So take your ease while you have the chance, and stand by our bargain. For I have tested you twice and found you a true knight, but the third time pays for all!"

So Gawain agreed, though somewhat reluctantly. And while his host went forth at the first light to hunt the fox, the knight slept quietly in his bed.

But the lady could not sleep, for her heart was bent upon making

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love to him. At last she rose and made her way to his room, clad only in a long loose robe that was cut so low it revealed all of her lovely throat and snowy breast. Her sweet face was unveiled, and she wore a cluster of pearls, the symbol of purity. Then she threw back the curtain and mocked him gaily.

"Gawain! Gawain! How can you sleep so soundly on such a beautiful morning?"

The knight started up from his gloomy dreams of the morrow, when he must meet his destiny at the trysting place, and catching sight of her sweet face and her flawless beauty, he felt suddenly cheered. The lady came to him laughing, and kissed him so tenderly that great temptation stood between them, so that he might have succumbed, had not Mary taken thought for her knight.

Then the lovely lady pressed him so hard and urged him so near to his limits, to take her to himself for her lover, that at last he was brought to the point when he must accept her love or bluntly refuse her. And while he feared such discourtesy, he was even more dismayed at the thought of treachery to his host. "Heaven forbid that that should happen!" he said to himself, and he parried desperately all the loving words that came from her lips.

Until at last she said bitterly, "It is all your fault, Sir Gawain, if you cannot make love to the lady who lies beside you. I am the most humiliated of all women in the world! Unless you already have a mistress to whom you have plighted your troth, which I am forced to believe, your conduct would be unpardonable!"

"Indeed I have no mistress," returned Gawain, quickly, "nor will I ever take one!"

"That hurts more than anything you could have said," exclaimed the lady. "But you have answered me truthfully, even though it hurts. And now give me one kiss before I go with my sorrow, for I love you most dearly."

Sighing, she stooped and kissed him. Then gently broke away from his arms and stood beside the bed. "And now, my dear," she begged him, "before I go, grant me at least this favour. Give me some keepsake, even if it is only your glove, to remind me of you and to comfort my grief."

"How I wish," said Sir Gawain, "for your sweet sake I might give you the most precious thing I have in the world, for you have deserved it many times over. It is not fitting that you should have only a glove as a keepsake for Gawain, and I have nothing in my meagre baggage worthy of one I hold so dear! I pray you do not take it amiss."

"Well," persisted the lady, "if I may have nothing of yours, then you shall have something of mine." And she held out to him a magnificent ring of red gold, with a bright jewel that sparkled in the

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sunlight. It was worth a king's ransom.

But the knight refused it, and said at once, " This is not the time for me to take gifts. Since I have nothing to offer you, I will accept nothing either." And although she begged him to take it, he remained adamant.

At last she said, " Perhaps you refuse my ring because it is too costly. Then take my girdle, which has no value of itself ! " And she unclasped the belt that fastened her gown—a girdle of green silk, tasselled and embroidered with gold—and begged him to accept it, unworthy as it might be.

But he swore he would accept nothing until the outcome of the morrow was known. " But do not be angry with me," he said, " for though I cannot grant your request, I am forever your knight."

" I suppose," said the lady, " that you refuse this silken girdle because it is such a paltry gift. But if you knew the powers that are woven into its fabric you might value it more. For the knight who wears this green girdle, so long as it is securely fastened around him, cannot be slain by any man on earth ! "

Then Gawain thought again, and it occurred to him that this was just the thing to guard against the peril that lay ahead. If it would help him to escape death on the morrow, it would be of inestimable value ! So he was more disposed to listen to her, and when she pressed him again to accept it, he consented.

Then she gave it him eagerly, but she begged him for her sake, never to reveal it, but conceal it loyally from her lord. And the knight promised that no man should ever know of it, but themselves alone. Then he thanked her repeatedly, from the bottom of his heart. And she kissed him a third time.

The moment she had gone, Gawain dressed himself, and having tucked away the girdle in a safe place, he hastened to the chapel and made his confession. And after he had received absolution, he returned to the castle and made merry till night fell and the lord returned, so that everyone declared they had never seen the knight in such high spirits.

When the lord came into the hall Gawain went forward promptly to greet him, and kissed him three times as sweetly and tenderly as the lady had kissed him. " Tonight I am the first to make good our bargain," he said gaily, " which we made to our mutual advantage, and pledged in wine."

" My word," exclaimed the lord, " you are doing well in your new business, provided you paid not too dearly for the bargain. Beside yours, mine are poor winnings ! For I have hunted all day and have caught nothing but this wretched fox—devil take it !—and it is a poor return for three such warm, loving kisses."

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"It is enough," said Gawain, and they went in together to dinner, and so they made merry until the time came for bed. Then Gawain bade them all a courteous farewell. "For," said he, "I must be on my way tomorrow morning, if you, Sir Knight, will lend me one of your men to guide me to the Green Chapel, where lies my destiny."

And the lord promised faithfully. Whereupon Gawain thanked him again, and took leave of the ladies and the rest of the noble company, who were all very sorry to see him go.

That night Gawain lay sleepless in his bed, listening to the wintry storms that raged outside. It was bitterly cold and the whistling wind was driving the snow into great drifts. And gloomily he listened to the cocks that crowed for the dawn that must bring him face to face with death.

Before daybreak he rose and called his servant, and while his horse was being saddled, he put on his shining armour and his coat of mail. Then he settled his sword in its scabbard, and knotted the girdle about his waist—to protect his life when he came to face the blow.

Gringolet was waiting for him, curvetting restlessly, as if he longed for a gallop. And after thanking his helpers, the knight set spurs to his horse and rode on his way, accompanied only by the groom who was appointed to guide him.

It was a grim ride, over frosty hills, and along misty moorlands and valleys where the snow-burdened streams had burst their banks and now foamed in spate. But as the dawn broke, the groom called a halt. "There is the place, yonder," he said to the knight, "but, as I am your true friend, Sir Gawain, I beg you not to go through with this business. For this man is a fiend who lives for the sake of killing, and no knight, however brave or strong who has passed this way has ever returned alive. For God's sake, let well alone, and go your way. You may count on me to keep your secret."

Then Gawain answered him sadly, "Many thanks, good sir. I know you wish me well, and would keep my secret faithfully, but however well you kept it, I should still be a coward in my own eyes if I turned aside now and shirked my duty. No, I will go on to the Chapel and meet my fate. For mighty as he may be, yet God is mightier!"

"Well," said the groom, "if you're really bent on throwing away your life, I will not try to dissuade you further. There is the path, by the side of yonder crag. Follow it until you come to the foot of the valley, and over on your left in a little glade you will find the Chapel you seek. Farewell, Sir Gawain! I would not come with you for all the money in the world!"

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And with that he wheeled his horse and galloped off, leaving the knight there alone.

Then Gawain said to himself, " Since there is no reasonable way out I must not complain, but put myself in God's hands," and he spurred Gringolet along the rough track which led down into the wild-looking valley.

At the foot he halted, looking about him for the Green Chapel, but there was nothing in sight—only the desolate crags over his head, that seemed to reach up into the clouds. Then he dismounted and hitched his horse to a tree, while he wandered across to a little hill hewn into a rough cave.

" Well," he debated with himself, " perhaps this is the Green Chapel. It is certainly a godforsaken enough spot for any kind of devilry ! I am coming to the conclusion that he was a fiend, after all, who appointed this tryst, and that he has brought me here to destroy me ! "

At that moment a terrible whirring sound echoed among the crags above his head, like a scythe being whetted on a grindstone. And Gawain recognized it for what it was—the instrument of death ! But he said to himself, " It's too late to cry off now, and if I have to die, at least I will meet death bravely ! "

Then he called aloud, " Where are you, Sir Knight ? For I have come to keep our bargain. Let it be now or never ! "

" Wait ! " cried a voice from the rocks above him. " And you shall soon have all that I promised you." And the rasping noise began again. Then suddenly he appeared over the shoulder of the hill, carrying the most enormous axe that was ever seen. He looked exactly as before, dressed all in green, with hair and beard of the same colour, but this time the head was restored to its proper place. He strode fiercely towards the knight, and when he came to the stream he hopped over it on his axe, and came hurtling down to stand beside Sir Gawain, who greeted him coldly.

" You have timed it well," said the Green Knight, " and you are welcome. Now all men may know that you are a man of your word. You remember our bargain twelve months ago, when you took a chance on the understanding that I should requite you this New Year's day ? Well now we are here, quite alone in this valley, with none to part us however fierce our combat. Take off your helmet, Sir Knight, and receive your due, offering no more resistance than I made to you when you struck off my head ! "

" God knows," answered Gawain, " I do not blame you. I have this blow coming to me ! But limit yourself, I pray you, to one stroke only, and I will stand still and offer you no resistance whatever."

Then he leaned forward and bared the white flesh of his neck,

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pretending that he did not care and showing no vestige of fear.

The Green Knight took his stance, and brandishing the mighty axe high over his head brought it down swiftly, as if he meant to destroy him utterly. And indeed, had it fallen, no man could have survived the blow. But Gawain glanced sideways, and catching a glimpse of the grim blade gliding down to strike him to the earth, he could not help flinching a little from its terrible edge.

Then the other checked the bright blade and swerved it aside, while he rebuked the knight with insolent words.

"Surely this is not Gawain, the knight who men say never quailed before the mightiest enemy? And now you shrink like a coward before you felt so much as a scratch. I never flinched when you aimed your blow at me in King Arthur's hall, even when my head rolled at your feet. Yet here you are, shivering in your shoes. Evidently I am the better knight!"

"I flinched once," admitted Gawain, "but I will not do so again, even if my head falls to the ground and I am unable, as you were, to put it back again. But hasten, Sir Knight, and deal me this blow once and for all! I will stand up to you, I promise you."

"Here goes then," cried the Knight, and lifted the axe, aiming a fierce blow, but withholding it yet a second time before it could strike. And Gawain awaited it steadfastly, standing stock still and never flinching the least bit.

"Aha!" laughed the Green Knight, then. "So you've got your courage back, have you? Then now is the time to deal with you properly! Push back your hood still further, and let us see if your neck can withstand this blow that is coming!"

Then Gawain was filled with anger and urged him fiercely to get on with the business, for this time he was certain he could expect no reprieve.

"Well, if you are so anxious," answered the Green Knight, "let us put it off no longer. You shall have what you came for, and promptly!" With that, he swung the axe lightly and brought it down right on the bare neck. But though he aimed hard, the blow did no more than graze the knight, and the edge of the blade only broke the skin slightly, so that a thin trickle of blood spread out of the cut and fell to the ground.

Then Gawain, seeing the red blood gleaming against the snow, sprang up hastily and grasping his sword, prepared to defend himself strongly. Never in his life had he felt so joyful, now his trial was over.

"Our bargain is fulfilled, Sir Knight!" he cried. "And if you strike me again I'll surely repay you!"

But the Green Knight only smiled and stood leaning on his axe,

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surveying his dauntless opponent. When he spoke his voice rang out clear as a bell.

"Do not be angry, Sir Knight," he said. "No man has ill-used you! I promised you a stroke, according to our covenant, and I have repaid you. We are now quits—but this I must tell you. Had I wished I might have dealt you a merciless blow and injured you fatally. But I held my hand! What is more, that first feint was repayment for the bargain we made at my castle, when you kept your word faithfully and returned all your winnings. And the second time was for the next day, when you gave me again my dear lady's kisses. For those two occasions I did you no harm, for the faithful need fear no danger.

"But the third time you failed in your trust, and for that you received a severer blow. That very green girdle you are wearing, and which my wife gave to you, belongs really to me. I know all about your kisses and the love-making of my wife, for I arranged it all and sent her to make trial of you. And indeed I believe you the most virtuous knight on earth. As a pearl of great price beside a mere pea, so is Gawain beside other gay knights. But over the girdle you failed just a little, though I cannot blame you for wishing to save your life!"

Then Gawain was bitterly ashamed and the hot blood beat into his cheeks as he tore the green girdle from his waist and flung it savagely from him.

"Cursed be cowardice!" he exclaimed fiercely, "for it can destroy a man's honour. I have broken my word, I confess it, Sir Knight, and shown myself false. But if it is possible, let me make amends, and I will take greater care for the future!"

Then the Green Knight laughed and said cheerfully, "You have confessed your faults freely, and I count you absolved. But I beg of you accept this girdle as a token, that whenever you look upon it you may remember this day's work, and your encounter with the Green Knight at the Green Chapel. And now, come back with me to my castle, and we will put things right with my wife, who treated you so ill!"

But Gawain would not. "I have stayed too long already," he said. "Though I pray you commend me to your lady, and the older one as well. I was beguiled, as better men before me, by the wiles of a woman. Would that we might love them, yet not trust them absolutely! But that is never the way. As for your girdle, God knows I thank you, and I will wear it as a memorial of my sin. So when pride stirs my heart for my prowess in arms, one glance at it may keep me humble. And now before I go, let me ask you one question. What is your true name, and who are you really?"

"In my own country," answered the Green Knight, "I am called

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Bercilac de Hautdesert. I tell you this truly! And it is the work of Morgan la Faye that has brought all this about. She is the ancient lady who dwells in my house, and she learned all her magic arts of Merlin, the wizard, whom once she beguiled into love. It was she who sent me to Arthur's house to put to the test the reputation of the Knights of the Round Table. She hoped to confound you all by this strange affair, and even bring about the death of Queen Guenevere, through fright! For she is Arthur's half-sister, and your own aunt. Now come back with me, and make her acquaintance."

But Gawain would not be persuaded, and after they had kissed and embraced, he mounted his horse and rode hastily on his way.

At last, after many adventures, he arrived safely at the Court of the King, still wearing the shining green girdle, the token of his fault, slung slantwise like a baldric, and fastened with a knot under his left arm. And the King kissed the knight, and the Queen too, and everyone welcomed him with great rejoicing, inquiring about his journey, and what had befallen him. Then he told them all of his hardships and adventures, until at last he came to the story of the girdle. Then he blushed for shame as he confessed his cowardice, and showed them the scar on his neck.

"See, my lord," said Sir Gawain, and showed them the girdle. "This is the token of my disgrace, the mark of cowardice which I must needs wear as long as I live. For no man can hide a thing of this kind. He must keep it for ever!"

Then King Arthur comforted his knight and all the court laughed heartily about the whole affair. But they agreed, as a token of their affection for Sir Gawain, that every member of the noble brotherhood of the Round Table should henceforth wear a slanting baldric of bright green, just like the knight's.

And so it became a part of the glory of the Round Table, and any man who wore it ever after was regarded with honour.

* * *

THE SPORTSMAN

Mr. Churchill has always held railway schedules in bland disregard, and his habit of catching a train by the skin of his teeth has always worried his travelling companions.

A friend once scolded him, but Mrs. Churchill explained. "Winston is such a sportsman," she said. "He always gives the train a chance to get away."

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WHO ONLY STAND AND WAIT

"Better a belief in anything," he had thought, "than in nothing"

by MICHAEL FOSTER

HE had never told her. But now was the time.

In weariness he laid down the pencil, and for a while sat looking at the ruled yellow tablet where under the desk lamp he had been writing a brief in the dry sentences, the embattled austerities, of corporation law. The apartment was very quiet. Above the hooded lamp the wall of books faded upward into a darkness which was faintly adrift with pipe-smoke. He had to be in court in the morning, on another case; but he hesitated about going to bed.

Although she had smiled goodnight an hour ago, he was almost sure that she was lying awake. The dead was with them both tonight, more that usual, and its secret was heavier with him. If he went in now they would start talking, from bed to bed in the dim light from the street below. And while now was the time to tell her, if he ever was going to, he didn't know how. He had never known how. Softly among the books, from the rainy darkness of the North River came the deep shaken roar of a big ship turning in the stream, calling to the great waters. He sat very still, listening.

The sea, and a girl's bowed head. The sea, which indifferently lifts up the wreckage of men into glittering sunlight and as slowly falls away again. He had come from horizons dark with the smokes of destruction, but the first time he ever saw her was on a summer afternoon, without wind, without any sound in the trees. Her bowed head, cool childlike gold in shadow—she was left over from a story he had heard on the other side of the world.

When he got out of the Navy he wanted to be alone for a while. He had enough money to buy a second-hand fishing boat in Seattle, and to knock around Puget Sound and the islands to the north for six months or so before he went back to his New York law-office. The boat was a double-ended Cape troller, the thudding of its heavy-duty engine sounding like the very pulse of loneliness across those wide waters.

It was pleasant to drowse at the wheel in the tiny one-man pilot-house, thinking a little, but mostly feeling peace creep back. His evening anchorage would be a wilderness cove somewhere, with the

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sun going down behind a dark timbered hill and the shadows reaching blue across the tide.

But one wet morning when he had the chart spread out on the table below and his breakfast dishes pushed aside, he found the setting of that story he had heard from a boy while a fighting ship raced plunging through the night of another sea. It was a headland, on the chart, a curving sandspit and at the end of it a rocky bit of land, not quite an island. From the story he knew there was a house there.

Washing his dishes and tidying up the cramped cabin, he thought that as long as he was this near he would cruise in that direction and have a look. It meant no more than that to him, at the time. In the vast hurrying confusion of lives in wartime you heard so many fragments of stories, often enough with a pitying shrug seeing the sorry wreckage and the problems that they didn't hear about at home: and afterwards, sometimes, something would remind you.

He went up the little steel ladder to the deck. The rain was beating his breakfast woodsmoke flat over the grey water of the cove. The lantern, slung in the rigging for a riding-light while he slept, still burned with a pale flame against the day. He took it down and blew it out. Going below again to stow it away, he poured a couple of tin cups of water over the driftwood embers in the small stove—there was a seaway running in the channel outside—and started the engine.

The weather cleared towards noon, and when in late sunshine he throttled down off the curving sandspit he saw the glimmer of a white dress among dark trees on the point. That fleck of life against great distances of sea and blue islands would be the girl, he thought, come back to the old farmhouse on the headland for another summer. It once had been a farm: on the main island, from which the sandspit reached out to form a bay, some ruined and brambly fields sloped upwards in the sun towards a timbered ridge. It was the setting as he had been told of it. There was something slightly uncanny about navigating into a story which was beautiful, mortal, and past. As if, leaning in the pilot-house window, one made out a landfall on the Sea-coasts of Bohemia, the coasts of illusion, of the world when young.

On an impulse he had not expected to have, an impulse of curiosity to see her and hear her voice as against that other voice remembered from a far-off ocean, he put the wheel over and crept into the bay which was shining with high tide and the summer sky. He was accustomed to bringing a bigger craft into an anchorage, and his mind kept the caution which men have who handle deeper draughts and tonnages of steel and power. The anchor went down into unearthly clear depths of water. Launching the dinghy with the

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usual sunburning sweat and irritation over old tackle, he rowed slowly to the beach.

There was a trail up from the sand, among rocks, and as he came up to the level he saw the girl standing motionless, a slender white figure on the lawn among shadows. She was watching him. The westering slant of the sun was red-gold on the tall trunks of the firs, under the dark boughs.

He had known of course that she was awfully young, probably still at school; but he was not prepared for that strange and lovely high-breasted dignity which tall young girls assume, perhaps to keep from skipping along and jumping as their swift feet still would like to do. The lines of a woman's beauty not quite emerged from the softness of childhood, the curve of lips which still would be merry in spite of herself—in the faces of the young only the eyes can hold sorrow. Hers were grey.

"You're Malory, aren't you?" he said. "My name is John MacAllister. I knew Rolf."

"Oh—you were his commander!" she said.

He nodded. "For a while."

She looked at him with the most clearly shining envy—at one who had seen Rolf after she had seen him last, who had been with him and shared his last days.

Hesitantly, almost shyly, she said: "But you weren't with him when . . . when he was . . ."

He guessed that even yet she had not learned to say the word "killed."

"No," he said. "That was a fleet action. I was kept on escort and patrol duty."

For the first time, her eyes fell. As painfully to them both as if she had said it, she was thinking that if Rolf had not been promoted and transferred from MacAllister's destroyer-escort to the battle-fleet he would be here now. Quickly recovering herself, she even smiled a little, and said:

"You'll stay for the evening with us, won't you? Let's go in and find my grandfather."

As they walked towards the sagging, comfortable-looking house he thought how much more gentle her voice was than one expected of youth; as if the hard, motionless flame of being young should cast softer shadows than one expected. Her voice was shadowy with midnights of great loneliness. He remembered that her mother and father were divorced; he didn't know where her mother was, but her father was married again and living in San Francisco. So in the summers she came from school and stayed here with her grandfather, a retired professor of history.

They found the old gentleman in his study with a lot of crumpled

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newspapers around his feet. He was wearing faded, much-washed corduroys and a baggy shirt. The air was thick with the smoke of Egyptian cigarettes and a large open tin of them was on the table at his elbow, among a week's accumulation of the New York and Boston papers and a couple of thick and learned-looking quarterlies. MacAllister found out later that they never bothered to go for the mail until they needed groceries or ran out of money, and then either Mr. or Mrs. FitzGibbon, the elderly couple who looked after him, would take the wildly clattering truck over twenty miles of island roads to the general store and post-office.

In the study there must have been four thousand books, untidy shelves from floor to ceiling, and tottering stacks behind chairs and tables. But in one place, convenient to his chair, a gap had been cleared on a bookshelf for a dozen tins of his Egyptian cigarettes, and in front of them in an untidy row were several mornings' coffee-cups. Malory said:

"Geordie—we have company. Commander MacAllister, this is my grandfather, Dr. Heath."

The old gentleman got up, frail and fierce with white moustaches, and as they shook hands they shared a faint twinkling of kindness, of amusement and a little sadness for the tall child who stood golden in the dusty light.

"You remember, in Rolf's letters," she said. "When he was on the destroyer-escort he wrote us about—"

"Yes. Yes, I know," Dr. Heath said. "I'm glad to see you, sir."

They both cleared their throats slightly with the peculiar awkwardness of two scholarly men meeting each other for the first time, and at a loss for small talk; and then it was Malory who was watching them with a faint kindly amusement of her own. She had the faculty of growing up suddenly before your very eyes—for a moment—as if the cool and ironical woman of the future looked sadly through the bright veil of youth.

Rolf had not expressed it quite like that, of course: he had said that she was awfully changeable, that sometimes she surprised you, the way she looked at you without saying anything. Rolf had been showing him her picture again, at the time, late one night. He had taken the flat leather case out of the breast pocket of his uniform and handed it, opened, to his friend. The girl's face, her steady eyes, and what she had written across one corner in her round, school hand: *I'm here.*

Dr. Heath shoved some papers and a couple of books out of another chair and nervously dusting it with the flat of his hand began saying some of the usual things that people say to a man just out of the service. MacAllister made the usual vague and polite replies, but it was easier after Malory brought in a tray on which were a

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bowl of ice, two glasses, and a pitcher of water to match the bottle of Scotch which the old gentleman hauled out of a dark corner of the shelves.

During dinner by sunset light in the farm dining-room, while Mrs. FitzGibbon stalked gaunt and listening between table and kitchen, Dr. Heath questioned him hesitantly about himself and his civilian life. MacAllister told them briefly of the law office and of his partners, much older, who had insisted that he take this time to breathe and look around before he came back to the grind. He told them of the club where he lived, and the thirty-six-foot yawl he used to keep at Larchmont, on Long Island Sound. He found himself talking easily to them as if he had known them for a long time, and not until after dinner in the study did the conversation get around to Rolf.

Malory watched him with very clear eyes, from where she sat in a high-backed chair beyond the lamp, while he tried to give them something brave and fine to remember. That was not difficult. MacAllister had been given one of the first destroyer-escorts to be sent around into the Pacific to release regular destroyers from convoy duties, and on that trim fast little ship Rolf had been a good junior officer. Also, he had been a nice boy, something gay and endearing about him, and MacAllister had been sorry to lose him.

He told Malory about the day Rolf's promotion came through, and his packing up to leave them for a destroyer in the battle-fleet. Only when he told about Rolf's waving back to them from the stern of the speeding motor-launch did Malory's eyes waver. She looked down at her hands folded in her lap. And after that, MacAllister rather trailed off. There was so much, so much he could not tell them, in the circumstances; that they ought not to know. This first evening, no one mentioned that Rolf was dead.

It was not until two or three days later that she let him see the arid depths of her desolation. He was still anchored in the bay of the curving sandspit. She had rowed out with him to see the boat, and they were sitting on the after-hatch. The four o'clock north wind of summer was beginning to roughen the channel to deep cobalt beyond the headland.

"I wish you could have known him here," she said. The wind lifted a long lock of her hair from her cheek, and let it fall again. "He belonged with the weather and the rain here."

Looking at a little sand from their feet eddying briefly on the deck, he found himself biting harder on his pipe-stem. Deliberately, he took the pipe out of his mouth, and nodded. Her thin fingers tightened on the edge of the hatch, as if, after thinking, she had found words for something she suddenly wanted him to understand.

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"There never was a time when he was not the other half of everything," she said. "I guess there never will be a time. You see; I remember him when he was a little boy. I've had that. I'll always have it. We were together all day, every summer as far back as I can remember—when he had to help me over fences, when we thought that the deep woods were enchanted. There was a place where the brook comes down from the hill, that we thought was so enchanted that nobody could ever find it except us. We thought that nothing, nothing harsh or dull could ever find us there—loud people with authority, and lessons, and . . . And the world, I suppose we meant. Sometime I'll show you that place where the brook turns, in the woods. I don't know why, but I'd like to."

After a while he raised his eyes a little to glance at her, but he could not see her face. The slender line of her shoulder, her head averted rigidly and shining in the sun—for the first time, for the very first time, he saw her stillness of grief, unspeakably bitter with rebellion. Against the ancient glitter of wind and water only her hair moved, and its blowing gold was for him the brief miracle of being alive.

"Let's start the boat," he said. "You take the wheel and I'll give the anchor a haul."

She got up abruptly and went forward along the deck. Her feet were light and sure in their sandals. Following her, he thought he had better get a grip on himself. It was no part of his meditative holiday, he thought, to become too interested in a young girl, especially this one. When he came back from securing the wet anchor on the foredeck, she was taking the boat out around the headland. There was only room for one in the pilot-house so he stood outside, leaning in the narrow door. The boat was beginning to buck, and a little water flew across the bows.

He had never been beyond the headland. As they rounded it, a wall of trees on the distant main shore crept back, and a broad bay opened out. This he knew from the boy's story, but he was surprised at the size of the house. With its porches it hung above a hillside of steeply terraced lawns; all its windows were shuttered and the grass was long in the wind. From the foot of the lawns a pier ran out into the bay; but the float had been taken up, and the pier stood high and inaccessible at low tide, with a row of gulls crouched sleepily on the railing. A *For Sale* sign was nailed there, but it looked unnoticed and indifferent, and its red and green paint was already weathered. The boy's family would never come here any more.

"Every summer we were a little older," she said. "And then all of a sudden, one afternoon, we were grown up. But too young to be married, they said."

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He turned his head slowly, and looked at her. Above the wheel her face had gone white, but scraps of broken sunlight reflected upward from the water danced gaily across it.

The boy had had that rare and forever magical experience which every man who deeply loves a woman wishes he might have had—to have been children together, to be able to remember the changing years from flying sunburned pigtails and a hot and dusty face to the quick shy pauses of long-legged sixteen. To have discovered the world together, finally discovering each other as man and woman; in the promise that they would always be together, all their lives.

And Rolf had thrown it away, though she did not know.

"Somehow you always remember him with the wind in his eyes, laughing," she said.

MacAllister screened the harshness of his expression by relighting his pipe.

But that night in the study, when Malory was out in the kitchen making a grocery list with Mrs. FitzGibbon, a gentle cough from Dr. Heath arrested MacAllister's hand as he reached towards a shelf where he had found some remarkable old volumes on mediæval common law.

"You are very discreet when you tell us about Rolf after—*hem!* we last saw him," the old gentleman said.

"Why, not at all," MacAllister said. "I can . . . only tell you my remembrances. They were limited, of course." This sounded too stilted and bland, even to himself, like something you'd say when you were cornered in court. He muttered uneasily: "I didn't see much of the kid. There were a lot of junior officers."

It was just possible that the doctor was smiling. You couldn't always tell, in a face so old.

"You are a good lawyer, John. Very quick and cautious in the mind," he said. Behind a large and equally bland cloud of cigarette smoke he murmured negligently, "But don't ever let Malory corner you. I doubt, though, that she will ever try." MacAllister looked at him sharply, but the doctor was saying in a voice suddenly very clear, very sad: "The blessing of belief, the great blessing . . . Well, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to me, son. It's your problem, and I can't advise you. I'm too far away in years."

MacAllister was silent. After awhile the doctor, examining the ash on the end of his cigarette, said carelessly: "I'm glad you came here, John. I've been worried about Malory. Her father—my son—is—*er*—well I've been worrying about what she would do after I depart to . . . *hmm*, perhaps continue my researches first-hand."

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The old boy, whose profession dealt with the clangorous ghosts, the dusty uproars of history, had scant regard for the polite reticences of the living: especially now that he was waiting halfway between, and could not be sure how much more time he had to say whatever was on his mind. At any rate, MacAllister thought, they understood each other; and as they heard Malory coming back along the hall, the doctor cleared his throat and reached guiltily for another cigarette.

"Geordie," she said from the doorway, "what have you been up to?"

"Why, not a damn thing, my dear," he said. "I was just telling John here that I wish he'd stay on for awhile. Sensible talk—you value it at my age. Not yours."

"Well, I'm glad if John's going to stay," she said. "But not because he's sensible. I hadn't noticed."

Looking back, he could never sort out with exactness the remaining weeks of that summer. For him, for once in his life, time lost its customary outlines: the rigid casings of days and weeks blurred in colours and sun which would light his way through musty law-books until he was an old man, and a wind of youth which would touch his cheek in the stalest court-room. The boat turning slowly on the tide with a dark-crowned cliff and all the hills beginning to slide away sideways, the metal salmon line making a slow frail circle of silver astern where it faded down into the dark fathoms; and Malory's face, weather-bright and interested, peering back from the pilot-house door as she held the wheel down. Coming in at sunset across waters of pale blue and deepening lilac towards where the headland was merged with the black forested hills under a new moon; a salmon lying on the hatch, catching the last of the light on its silver mail; and Malory standing in the stern, lonely and motionless against the white wake, looking at the sea of islands in the darkening east. Evenings in the study, voices as tranquil as the turning of a page in lamplight, and sometimes, so rare as to be remembered, Malory's quick soft laughter at something one of them had said. It was a good summer, it was his summer of being young with her, and once she showed him the lost place where the brook turned.

It was a late August afternoon, gold and smoky weather from distant forest fires on the mainland, and they were on their way with tin pails to gather blackberries. They had followed the brook up from its singing gravel bars into the woods, and at the foot of an enormous fir-tree she stopped.

"There used to be an odd thing here, something we always looked for the first time we came back every summer," she said.

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" In the middle of the stream, there among the other rocks where you can cross if you are careful, was one where the water and the gravel and the weather long ago had worn down a mark that looked like a footprint, we thought. The print of an Indian moccasin on stone. It was a sign, and we never told anyone."

She hesitated, glancing at him with a faint defensive amusement. This silent place was a slope of moss, walled in by ferns, and where the sun struck down through the fir boughs to the clear flow of water you could see pebbles of dull wet green and of antique vermilion, Indian colours.

" When I looked for it last summer it was gone," she said. " Sometimes after the autumn winds all the creeks here are choked with drift and dead branches, and when the big rains come everything is washed away and even the rocks are tumbled around."

She hesitated again ; with parted lips, as if about to say something that was suddenly of importance to them both. But instead she turned away, almost indifferently, from the slope of moss, and walked off among the dark crowding trunks of the firs. Following her, crushing the earth-smelling ferns underfoot, he knew that it was a goodbye she didn't know how to say yet, even to herself. The first of many secret goodbyes that people say before they are old. To places that are mostly the same, but have grown small and somehow empty. But the first, he thought, was the most desolate : when with adult sorrow you turn back to things you knew as a child, and they aren't there any more. She didn't look at him as he caught up with her ; they went on to pick blackberries on the sunny hill, and that afternoon he knew that sooner or later she would marry him.

As with everything she ever did, it came about simply and directly, with a sort of clear honesty he had not found in other women. Autumn came early that year, and on a grey day when a storm was forecast for tomorrow they cruised to some great duck-flats on the mainland. The first flights were coming in, mallards and pintails flying low and fast in the rain. They anchored well out because the tide was ebbing, and leaving the troller pitching slowly on the lead-coloured bay they rowed in among the intricate winding channels of open water. They rowed in silence except for the whisper of rain, but when they stopped and sat motionless on the wet thwarts they heard unseen ducks beginning to talk again, questioningly, all around them. The walls of autumn-dulled sedge stood higher than a man's head, and in these secret channels there was no wind. Six mallards came skimming in from the north, wings slanted set for braking, and orange legs thrust downward : but above the boat and the human figures they flared and climbed wildly in a tumult of reaching wings and frantically vertical bodies.

Malory's face was upturned, and the line of her throat above the

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close-buttoned collar of her yellow jacket; a little rain-darkened hair plastered on one cheek under the brim of her hat. MacAllister said abruptly:

"I wish I could be here when the season opens."

"Won't you be?" she said.

"No. I've got to go back to work sometime, and there isn't any use in putting it off any longer."

She looked at him meditatively; and her eyes, greyer than usual in the rain, seemed clearly to read why he couldn't stay here any longer like this.

"Geordie says I should marry you," she said.

Fumbling for his pipe he said: "Oh, Malory—" and stopped because she had laid her wet fingertips upon the back of his hand.

"And I rather think I should, too," she said.

He turned to her so sharply that the boat tilted and some loose water ran over the feet of their boots: but he didn't say it because her fingertips were still on his hand, but pressing a little harder.

"It won't be the same," she said. "It couldn't be, and you know. I've let you know. If I hadn't known Rolf I think I'd love you terribly. You're everything that I've always thought about, that a man should be, and I do love you, I think, John. I like you, anyway, and I'd like to be with you the rest of my life. It's better than anything else, for both of us, and I do have the rest of my life and you have yours. That's all I can say and be honest. I'll try to be a good wife—but there'll always be Rolf. We both knew him, and that will help when I have to be truthful, living together."

Quietly, quietly he thought that indeed they both had known him. For his part he had a series of pictures, disconnected because he hadn't particularly been watching the boy, he hadn't been interested in the bright gallopings of a junior ashore. But he remembered several times seeing him with girls, different girls, in the cafés of war-vivid ports of the Pacific: Honolulu, Wellington, Sydney, Darwin—the ports and the cafés and the girls, the laughter and the hands holding hands and the bottles uncorked against the mutterings under the sea-horizons in the darkness, out there. He remembered especially a café in Wellington one night.

MacAllister was there with two senior officers, tired men who had faint dry lines around battle-stubborn eyes. At a far corner table he saw Rolf with a local woman, older than himself and dressed too formally for the circumstances. Their heads were close together; Rolf's face was flushed and brilliant, and a good many people were watching them. One of the sea-greyed officers smiled faintly, crumbling a piece of bread. MacAllister said clearly: "One of my youngsters. He's got the makings of a good man." The older

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officer, a captain, murmured: "Of course, Mac. The boys are magnificent. At that age nothing matters. His taste will improve."

With Malory's hand waiting on his, MacAllister still could understand it. A boy whose whole life had been identified with the life of one girl, taken too suddenly out of the clear and gentle land of never-never which he had shared with that one girl; and on the other side of the world, in hurried and dissolving times, finding that the same gaiety and careless charm worked as well and more quickly on other women, on any number of other women—it was, MacAllister supposed, a natural reaction. Sadly he thought that given a few more years, a chance at quietness again, and the boy might have been all right.

It must have been that woman, the one in the Wellington café that night, who made trouble. On a ship so small as a destroyer escort you know about everything. It was vague: some loose wardroom talk, some smothered grins, and Rolf going about his work with a harassed and defiant-scared set to his jaw. MacAllister watched, without particular interest, and said nothing. He judged it was nothing permanently serious—probably a worldly and determined woman turned threatening; but even then he felt a certain æsthetic sadness, as of a ruined story, when he remembered all the boy had told him and the girl's picture in the flat leather case. And then, too, he had had a glimpse of Rolf which stuck in his mind.

They were on a convoy of tankers, and MacAllister had stayed on the bridge until two o'clock in the morning. There was a great sky of stars, and the dark convoy stood along a horizon of lucent space, showing dim slow flashes of foam and wake. He was on his way down to the wardroom for a cup of coffee with his engineer officer, who was waiting there, when he passed the half-open door of the cabin which Rolf shared with another ensign. The boy was in there alone, and in the travelling night-sounds of the ship he did not hear MacAllister's step. He was just standing there, under the light, unconsciously braced to the roll and jerk; staring at a blank steel bulkhead with a terrible and sleepless face, with the eyes of the lost. MacAllister hesitated, but then went on.

Whatever the worry was, Rolf carried it with him to the battle-fleet and to his death. There was a late afternoon when from a harbour MacAllister watched a line of destroyers slipping out to sea against a wall of cloud standing black with thunders and hung with the smokes of a mighty gathering. Somewhere in that deadly line of battle-messengers was the boy from his own ship, and that was the last he ever saw of him. Later he heard that Rolf had been killed: in a night battle, when the destroyers went in.

"So I'll marry you, John," Malory said. It was raining harder,

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dripping off her hat-brim. "I'll make the best life for us that I can, together. I don't think I'll fail you in anything. Just so you remember, and be patient. I hate to have to ask that."

With difficulty, he said: "You don't have to ask. I'll never fail you, either, Malory."

"Oh dear, I know I'm awfully wet and I guess not very romantic-looking," she said, "but you might kiss me, John, if you want to."

In the long silence from the drifting boat, two mallards came swimming around a little headland of the sedge.

And so tonight, in their New York apartment, with his pipe lying cold under the desk lamp where it had spilled some grey ash on the opened pages of a law book, he sat alone with the follies of the dead. He thought that perhaps only those who have been in war—who have had the sentimentality burned out of them—can realize that having lived foolishly and impulsively does not keep a man from dying bravely. It was something you could not explain to the sentimental stay-at-homes.

With his head bent forward as if listening to voices lost long ago, he was also thinking about these years of his marriage. It had turned out as well—maybe better than might have been expected. As a companion she was charming and sometimes gay; as a wife she had an exceeding sweetness. If she had kept a picture of Rolf he never saw it; she had it put away somewhere. She almost never mentioned him. Only, at the most unexpected moments, a turning away of the smiling face in the stillness of grief.

But now there was going to be a child. And he knew how deeply, how silently, it was in her mind that this child would have been Rolf's. So that in his mind, too, was that profound and bitter consciousness, always there, spoiling the idea of having a son.

He heard her getting out of her bed and coming towards him on slippered feet along the hall. Reaching for his pipe he felt her presence behind his chair, and her hand gently on his shoulder. She said:

"Tired?"

"No, not especially," he said. "I've just been sitting here thinking of some things we . . . we ought to talk over."

"Important ones?" she said with the delicate amusement of a married woman when her husband becomes portentous.

Still he was conscious that today she had been brooding tragically, probably with tears, thinking more than usual about Rolf.

"Yes. I think important ones," he said grimly.

But when she sat down in a big chair, with her feet curled up under her, he knew suddenly that he would never tell her. Belief,

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belief in anything was so great a blessing: it was not for him to destroy it. He could never break something that had always been so beautiful to her.

She was watching him from her big chair; and he smiled. Hopelessly, he thought he must rely upon the child and upon time. Perhaps as time passed, the child would gradually supplant the memory of Rolf in her heart; and with the child between them, he himself might be included. He could only continue to wait.

"John," she said abruptly, "I've got something to tell you. Something I guess you've known anyway, all along."

It was she who was smiling now: the same smile, strained with effort.

"I had a letter from Geordie this morning," she said. "There was an enclosure. A note from Rolf."

From the pocket of her robe she took a folded square of paper, and handed it to him.

"Rolf didn't even have the courage to write it to me," she said bitterly. "He wrote Geordie. After he left your ship."

He opened the single sheet of paper and looked at it. She was right: it was only a note. Dazedly, his eyes picked up some words in the middle of it:

> ". . . as man to man, I feel sure that you will understand. If I had known more of the world I could not have planned my whole future with a girl so young and inexperienced as Malory. We were both children, really, and it is better to think of it that way. I am going to marry a woman who really understands me. Tell Malory it was awfully sweet to have known her, and I will always remember her. When we get back, she must certainly come to dinner some time and meet Gloria . . ."

Refolding it carefully, MacAllister handed it back to his wife.

"I don't want to read any more of it," he said.

"It's—as Geordie said, it's callow, and it stinks," she said. "Geordie's letter was full of great curses."

He had sense enough to say nothing, not even to reach out his hand towards hers.

"Geordie wrote that he was afraid to give me that . . . that note when it came, all these years ago. He said he was afraid it would do terrible things to me. I . . . I suppose it would have. He said he thought that belief in anything was better than belief in nothing. But now, he said, with . . . with the baby coming, he thinks that the belief is destructive. Oh, John, he's right. It has been."

After a long, motionless time she whispered:

"John, you've been so good."

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Absent-mindedly, he shook his head. From far away now in the rainy darkness came the muffled roar of a big ship calling to the deeps. To the sea which lifts up, and as slowly falls away again. They too had run far courses, and lonely ones, but now she reached for his hand.

* * *

NOT AT BEDTIME!

That chill moment in all good suspense stories when the heart seems to miss a beat! Allow one point for recognising the character in each situation, one for the author, and one for the source, twenty-seven in all. Twenty-one is excellent, fifteen is good, and twelve rates a pass! The answers are on page 103.

1. *From the fearful scimitar to the ordeal by fire in this underground vault of terror—and now the deadly well! He looked over the brink. And he refused to comprehend the meaning of what he saw!*

2. *"I was frightened," said Tom to his fellow passengers, "terribly frightened. At last I . . . went over the ship . . . No one said a word to me for a very simple reason. There's no one on board to say anything. No captain, no crew, no nothing."*

3. *In that moment he lifted his hands and held them suspended as if he blessed his satellites . . . If I saw long clawlike fingernails, my surmise would prove correct . . . Ten fingertips touched, moved apart and together again in meditative gesture . . .*

4. *The door of the back room opened, and the First Sea Lord came out . . . and for a second we looked each other in the face. Only for a second, but it was enough to make my heart jump . . . Not a moment could be lost . . .*

5. *They followed from the snowy bank Those footmarks, one by one, Into the middle of the plank; And further there were none!*

6. *"Don't you go yellin'," he said, and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still . . .*

7. *The dead men stood there, all together—and all fixed on me their stony eyes, that in the Moon did glitter!*

8. *The sky above our heads was inky black. But the sky on the horizon was not dark at all. It was shot with crimson . . . And the ashes blew towards us with the salt wind from the sea.*

9. *And there it was, — that terrible countenance, with the moonlight falling over it, and displaying all its horror. The snakes, whose venomous nature could not altogether sleep, kept twisting themselves over her forehead . . . !*

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MR. WADDY

In a lonely beach cottage, anything could happen.. But of course nothing would

by WILL F. JENKINS

IT was night. Mr. Waddy held in his hands the wheel of a brand-new car. There were clouds hiding the moon and stars. There was nothing in sight, nothing but the highway and the marsh reeds on either side, and the line of desolate, no-longer-used telephone poles. This, Mr. Waddy knew, was a two-mile stretch of perfectly straight road. It led to the sand dunes of the Spit. There was nobody anywhere about to see what Mr. Waddy did.

Until the last eighteen months he had been a bookkeeper all his life. His highest hope of adventure had been the discovery of a good murder mystery to read while he sipped the pot of chocolate which nightly prepared him for sleep. This, now, was opportunity. Nobody in the world even knew where he was. So—

He sent his car surging forward. It roared through the night like a meteor racing through blackness. Mr. Waddy's eyes glowed in the light of the instrument board. His expression grew rapt. Exalted. He hit eighty miles an hour, a thrill and triumph unprecedented in his whole existence.

Presently he eased up. There were only two miles of perfectly straight road. When the highway ended and sandy ground appeared on either side he regretfully dropped to his usual sedate pace, but he felt the better for his daring. He was subtly if slightly raised above the inoffensive person whom only the loud and firm insistence of Mr. Hatch—chairman of the Jamenon Combine—had raised to the eminence of treasurer of that concern.

He looked carefully for the side turning to Mr. Hatch's cottage. It was the only cottage on the Spit. There was a naval base nearby, with a deep-water wharf, but it had been deserted for three years now, and Mr. Waddy felt a thrill at the reflection that there was no other human being within miles. He was alone as he could not remember ever having been before. In such isolation, he told himself with zest, practically anything could happen. But of course he knew that nothing would.

Here was the turning. It was a narrow gravel track leading to

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the cottage used by Mr. Hatch during the summer. Mr. Waddy had never thought such thoughts before, but now he felt a certain rakish satisfaction in guessing that a person of Mr. Hatch's tastes might find such enormous privacy useful at other seasons of the year also.

He followed the winding track, between dunes and over dunes, and presently he saw the reflection of his headlights in the windows of the cottage. He drove on. He reached the cottage. When the noise of the engine ceased the sensation of thrilling isolation grew deeper.

He heard the deep-bass roar of unseen surf beating upon a hidden shelving shore. The cottage, beside the car, was creakingly silent. A wind hummed and moaned about its roof.

Mr. Waddy drew in his breath in sharp perception of thrill. He took out the cottage key, unlocked the door, and was greeted with the dry stuffiness of a shut-up seashore cottage. He switched on the electric light. Everything was in order—dusty but undisturbed. He had been here twice before as Mr. Hatch's guest. He carried his bag inside, and the parcel of documents he had been instructed to bring.

He found the flashlight and went out to start the electric-light plant. It was in a small shed only yards behind the cottage. He closed the door behind him and stood still a moment, savouring the lonely noises of the dark. The boom of the surf and the throbbing of the motor. Dark clouds and isolation. This was fascinatingly perfect as the setting for murder, except, of course, that there was nobody around either to kill or to be killed.

Something touched his leg. A tingling chill went all over him. Then the flashlight beam showed a black-and-white cat rubbing in the brazen overtures of its kind when hungry. The crawling sensation at the back of Mr. Waddy's neck ceased, and he laughed a little. He had a very pleasant laugh.

"Hello, kitty!" he said amiably. "You don't fare so well out here in the wilds, eh? Hungry? Come along. I'll give you something to eat."

He held open the cottage door. The cat stalked confidently in before him, its tail held erect. Mr. Waddy chuckled. He had looked forward to this night with anticipation. Presently he would make a pot of hot chocolate and set out a cup, and luxuriously settle down in this extraordinary setting to read a new murder mystery by his favourite author. The desolate isolation of his position would multiply the thrills of the book. This cat, purring at his feet, would add a perfect touch. Tonight's reading of a murder mystery would be an unforgettable experience.

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He went happily into the kitchen. The shelves were stocked with everything storable in tins. He took down a tin of evaporated milk. He started to wipe dust from its top, but there was no need. He poured a saucerful of the creamy stuff and put it on the floor, beaming. The cat, its tail waving grandly, lapped with a tiny pink tongue and perfect table manners.

Mr. Waddy went even more happily into another room. Dusty to be sure. He shifted a comfortable chair comfortably close to a reading lamp. He placed a little table for his chocolate pot and cup. He went into the bedroom and set out his dressing gown and pyjamas. Presently he would don the dressing gown and his adventure would really begin. With every light but one extinguished he would sit and read his murder story and sip his nightly chocolate.

He found hangers for his coat and vest. Tonight, to match the richness of this atmosphere, he would make his chocolate richer—a few malted-milk tablets added to the pot. He was about to slip off his coat when he heard an obscure sound in the kitchen. It was a peculiar unrhythmic thumping. He went to see what it was.

The saucer of milk was spilled. The cat was kicking convulsively. It lay on the floor, moving with extraordinary stiffness. Its muscles stood out like cords. They moved without purpose. The cat appeared to be unconscious. As Mr. Waddy looked at it in absolute stupefaction it made a final, violent contortion of all its body. Then it was still. It was quite dead.

Mr. Waddy stared at it. He took off his glasses and polished them and put them back on. The cat was still dead. It had been perfectly healthy and playful not more than ten minutes ago. Nothing had injured it. It had been hungry. It had drunk of the milk Mr. Waddy poured out for it. Now it was a corpse.

Blankly Mr. Waddy looked at the almost-empty milk tin. He sniffed at it. It smelled all right. It was not sour or spoiled at any rate. There was a very faint aroma—Mr. Waddy's mind said, "*Peaches!*"—and the inappropriate smell of peaches meant poison.

He thought for a long time unhappily. Then he gingerly laid the limp furry body on a dustpan and carried it out to the lighting-plant shed. He would bury it properly on the morrow. Meanwhile—

He was trying halfheartedly to assure himself that this very small tragedy would contribute to the proper atmosphere for his reading when something occurred to him. He stopped short where he stood. He planned to make his usual, nightly pot of chocolate. He had given the cat its milk from the first tin his hand touched. But for the cat he would have made his own chocolate from that

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tin. But for the cat he would have drunk the milk the cat had drunk. And the cat had died immediately after drinking it!

A cold, icy feeling went all over Mr. Waddy's body. It started at his spine and spread. He went back to the kitchen. He picked up the milk tin again. It had not needed to be dusted. Everything else in the house was dusty but not this particular tin. He turned it over. After a moment he cut the top away so that he could examine the interior fully. He felt a very peculiar, unbelieving horror.

Someone had punched a hole in the bottom of the evaporated-milk tin and then soldered it up again. There was no question about it. It was not done at the factory. The punctured metal on the inside was sharp and jagged. And it could not have had any possible purpose—unless to permit the thrusting of a hypodermic needle through such a tiny hole for the injection of a substance that would give a faint scent of peaches to the milk. But of course nobody would do a thing like that! Nobody had any reason!

"It's ridiculous!" said Mr. Waddy in an oddly thin voice.

He could not believe it. But he did. After a moment he took down another tin from the shelf. He noticed the dust. The shelf was dusty. Everything was dusty but the tops of the—there had been four but now there were three—tins of evaporated milk.

Mr. Waddy, with trembling hands, lifted them and looked underneath. Each had been punctured and resealed. Two other tins at the extreme rear were dusty. And they had not been tampered with.

Sweat came out on Mr. Waddy's forehead. Somebody had come into the cottage within the last twenty-four hours. Possibly the last twelve. Perhaps the last two! That somebody had replaced the original tins with opened and resealed tins, the contents of which smelled faintly of peaches. The inference was inescapable but preposterous.

Mr. Waddy had come here with certain documents and records of the Jamenon Combine. Mr. Hatch had asked him to come here with all due precautions for secrecy. There was a matter of refinancing certain of the company's obligations. Mr. Hatch—as chairman—had arranged quite confidentially to bypass the usual underwriters and arrange the refinancing at a much lower cost. He might save the company thousands. But it had to be absolutely secret until achieved, lest the underwriters be antagonized by the attempt to cut their profits. It was a perfectly legitimate business deal. It was not even conceivably a motive for murder.

Mr. Waddy stood ashen-white in the kitchen of Mr. Hatch's

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cottage. He had narrowly escaped death. Perhaps he had not escaped it! The device had been intended for him and no one else. His nightly pot of chocolate was traditional. Everybody knew about it. Anybody who knew him could have contrived this in absolute certainty that once he arrived they would only need to wait a reasonable time to find him dead. Then the company's documents would be at the killer's disposal. When Mr. Hatch arrived there need not be any sign at all that he had ever been here. He would have vanished from the face of the earth.

His murderer would be waiting outside now for him to die. Sooner or later he would be peering in at the windows to see if Mr. Waddy was yet dead. And if he saw Mr. Waddy plainly discovering the murder scheme the killer would take more violent measures.

Mr. Waddy, shaking, put the emptied tin into the dust bin. He turned on the burner of the stove which was served by cylinder gas. He broke three matches before he could strike a light. Then he half-filled a pan from the tap and put it on to boil. When it boiled he would normally add tinned milk and chocolate and malted-milk tablets, and let it simmer. So, desperately, to deceive his possible waiting murderer, Mr. Waddy went through the routine as if he suspected nothing.

While the water heated he went to the bedroom. He moved like an exceptionally well-trained automaton. His mind seemed frozen by the knowledge of his intended murder. He was alone and unarmed and unbelievably isolated. The surf boomed hollowly on the beach. The wind whined and mourned about the cottage. Outside there was unrelieved blackness and absolute emptiness. And by morning the wind would have erased the footprints his murderer made and there would be no sign anywhere . . .

Mr. Waddy's throat seemed to twist into a strangling knot. He felt the presence of someone resolved upon his death. But surely while he behaved as if unsuspicious, as if he moved regularly towards the fruition of the murderer's plan, that murderer would not break into the cottage to destroy him with violence!

Mr. Waddy tried to swallow and failed. He turned out the light in the bedroom and composed his features in the blessed dark. Then he went back to the kitchen. There were two windows there. He played for the audience of the man who intended that he should die tonight by opening a tin of evaporated milk, by adding chocolate to the merrily boiling water. He put in the malted-milk tablets . . .

The chocolate simmered. It rose in the pan and he turned

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down the flame, watching it, his face grey, hearing the surf and the wind and the monotonous throbbing of the motor. And he felt eyes upon him. Mr. Waddy's throat was dry as he poured the foaming chocolate into an earthenware teapot. As he half-filled a cup. Then he should drink—

No . . . Grasping at a straw for delay, he carried it, stumbling, into the next room and set down the pot and cup on the table by his chosen easy chair. His killer undoubtedly moved to watch in the living room windows.

Mr. Waddy looked down at his coat. He made an arrested gesture as if to remove it. He went into the bedroom—now darkened—as if to put on his dressing gown. In the blessed dark of the bedroom he almost fell from pure panic. But instead he tiptoed across the room to the window nearest the sea. He stood there panting. He listened.

The surf boomed. He waited until it had reached its loudest, and then with chattering teeth he eased up the window. In desperate stealth and desperate silence he slipped out.

He fled into the darkness.

A long time later he realized that he had escaped. He was a mile and more from the cottage with his lungs bursting and no sign anywhere that anything had happened. The surf still roared upon the beach. The wind still blew. Over the sea he saw a far-distant speck of light. A lighthouse. There was nothing else in all the world.

Mr. Waddy found a hiding place. He crouched in the foliage of a stunted tree and waited, shivering. The wind would erase his footprints and he could not be traced to this place unless his killer began to follow immediately. Surely all persons murderously inclined would go away when the members of the business conference began to arrive. But Mr. Waddy would not attempt to return before dawn!

So he stayed hidden all night long. Insensibly he gathered some shreds of confidence as the long hours passed and no dark shape came plodding through the night to destroy him. He even thought out, shuddering, what must be the murderer's plans. Ultimately he came even to perceive a peculiar beauty in his surroundings. He noticed, certainly, the first faint greyish glow on the eastern horizon. He watched from his hiding place as the miracle of dawn progressed. The whole eastern quadrant of the sky acquired a ghostly radiance; the waves which rolled towards the shore showed moving liquid surfaces of dull steel colour above their ink-black troughs. And then Mr. Waddy saw the shapes of the dunes about him.

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It was then that he heard the faint murmur and saw the headlights of a car on the highway. It was very far away and moved fast.

It reached the sandy ground of the Spit, purred confidently on and went out of sight behind the dunes between Mr. Waddy and the highway. He knew, suddenly, that it was Mr. Hatch. He'd said he would come early, and that he and Mr. Waddy would have a final conference after his arrival and be ready for the negotiations when the other people arrived at ten o'clock.

Mr. Waddy waited until he was sure his superior had reached the cottage. Dawn was well advanced by now. Mr. Waddy took a deep breath. With an odd knot in his stomach muscles, he made his way to the beach and walked on its firm sand towards the cottage. He surmounted a dune and saw Mr. Hatch's car.

Mr. Hatch himself was outside and moving away from the cottage. His short, rotund figure was unmistakable. Mr. Waddy opened his mouth to call him but Mr. Hatch disappeared around a dune. He gazed about him hurriedly. It looked as if he searched for something that should be lying on the sand.

Mr. Waddy swallowed. He felt rather foolish, and he probably looked as discomposed as he felt. Mr. Waddy trudged on and into the house. He went into the living room. He started. The pot and half-filled cup of chocolate had been taken from the table beside the easy chair. He went into the kitchen. The dishes had been emptied and rinsed and were ready to be dried. They still glistened with wetness. Then Mr. Waddy saw a paper bag on the draining board. Mr. Waddy looked inside. It contained four tins of evaporated milk. They had not been opened and sealed again. They were the way tins of evaporated milk should be, without any soldered punctures.

Presently, painfully, Mr. Waddy looked to see if there were any fresh footprints about the house other than his own and Mr. Hatch's. He was not in sight when Mr. Hatch came walking heavily back to the house, looking uneasy and scared and baffled.

Mr. Waddy watched through cracks in the shed which sheltered the electric-light plant. Mr. Hatch wiped sweat from his face and went into the cottage. Mr. Waddy still gave no sign of his presence. He waited in the little shed—watching through the window of the kitchen—as Mr. Hatch made coffee and once went hastily out of the kitchen to search every room of the cottage again. He watched while Mr. Hatch, trembling, gulped down a cup of smoking coffee, heavily laced with milk from one of the tins he'd brought in the paper bag. But he did not sit down. He paced restlessly, his forehead creased as if in mounting anxiety and bafflement.

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At long last Mr. Waddy went quietly out of the shed and to the cottage. He consciously straightened himself before he went in. He met Mr. Hatch in the kitchen, and did not seem to see the expression of sheer unbelief—of terrified unbelief—with which Mr. Hatch regarded him. Instead, Mr. Waddy said:

"I—hope you haven't eaten or drunk anything, Mr. Hatch. I—didn't recognize you when I first got back, and I set a trap for someone who tried to murder me last night."

Mr. Hatch made a wheezing noise, staring at Mr. Waddy.

"They were going to murder me and put me in your car, Mr. Hatch," said Mr. Waddy with difficulty, "in the car you told me to drive down here. They were going to run it off the wharf. I'd probably never have been found, and if I ever was it would be thought I'd committed suicide—You haven't drunk any coffee, have you?"

Mr. Hatch made a choking sound. He shook visibly.

"There was—something wrong with the milk," said Mr. Waddy, wetting his lips. "So—when I found somebody'd brought new tins of milk to replace the ones that were wrong, I—I switched them. The—tins in the bag are the ones that were on the shelf. I hope you didn't use any of them."

Mr. Hatch stiffened. He made jerky, purposeless gestures. Then he tried to scream. But only a reedy whispering noise came out of his mouth. Then he collapsed quite abruptly.

Half an hour later Mr. Waddy drove away from the cottage. Mr. Hatch looked rather like a cocoon in the back seat, swathed in many bonds made from strips of a torn-up sheet.

Mr. Waddy drove with anxious care. He was very unhappy. Of course after Mr. Hatch had done so much for him he would not really have risked letting him drink poison. But he was still unconscious in the back seat and Mr. Waddy was beginning to be worried about him. Just then, however, Mr. Hatch made groaning noises. Mr. Waddy looked relieved. He drove on more briskly. Presently—

"Waddy!" croaked Mr. Hatch. "Waddy! What—"

"You won't die, Mr. Hatch," said Mr. Waddy reassuringly. "I just wanted to be sure who'd tried to murder me. You didn't drink any poison. I watched through the window to make sure that you used one of the tins you brought—not one from the shelf. I didn't switch them at all. So you only thought you'd drunk the milk that was meant for me, and you fainted. But you were unconscious so long that I was worried about you."

Mr. Hatch gasped. Mr. Waddy said unhappily:

"Of course, I see that if I'd—vanished into thin air—or off

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that wharf—I see that it might have been convenient for you. It was—rather a shock to realize that that's what must have been going on. I—I feel terrible, Mr. Hatch, to think that it's possibly the reason you used your influence to get me elected treasurer of the Company. And I can't help worrying . . . How much have you stolen from the company, Mr. Hatch, that you were going to pretend I had embezzled after you'd murdered me?"

He was very unhappy. But just then the car reached the highway. It was two miles of perfectly straight road. Mr. Waddy sent the car surging forward and his look of unhappiness vanished. The motor roared. Mr. Waddy's eyes gleamed. The car hit eighty.

* * *

ANSWERS to NOT AT BEDTIME on page 94

1. *The prisoner of the Inquisition in "The Pit and the Pendulum," by Edgar Allan Poe.*
2. *Tom Prior in the play "Outward Bound," by Sutton Vane.*
3. *St. Ebenezer (Pulo Besar) in "Fair Wind to Java," by Garland Roark, published in the recent issues of Argosy.*
4. *Richard Hannay in "The Thirty-Nine Steps," by John Buchan.*
5. *The distracted parents in the poem "Lucy Gray," by William Wordsworth.*
6. *Lennie in "Of Mice and Men," by John Steinbeck.*
7. *The Mariner in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.*
8. *The de Winters, riding towards Manderley, in "Rebecca," by Daphne du Maurier.*
9. *Perseus, meeting Medusa in the Greek legend of the Gorgon's Head.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Haricot. 5, Bucolic. 9, Armoury. 10, Spanner. 11, Sandhurst. 12, Flora. 13, Yield. 15, Dog Kennel. 17, Sheerness. 19, Remus. 22, Leash. 23, Companion. 25, Epigram. 26, Trestle. 27, Tangent. 28, Retinue.

Down. 1, Hearsay. 2, Romance. 3, Couch. 4, Tay Bridge. 5, Beset. 6, Chauffeur. 7, Lincoln. 8, Curtail. 14, Dark Horse. 16, Gasometer. 17, Solvent. 18, Elation. 20, Moisten. 21, Sincere. 23, Comet. 24, Adept.

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EVE

Womman is mannes joye and al his blis

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Dearest, I want nothing this night to complete the joy I am in but thy dear company and the brats . . .

RICHARD LEGH, *in a letter to his wife Elizabeth*, 1670

In the Beginning

In the beginning of time . . . the god Tvashti created the world. Out of the elements he created the sun and moon and stars, the hills and forests, and finally man himself.

All the solid elements were exhausted in the creation of man. So, when the time came to fashion woman, Tvashti took the roundness of the moon, the curves of the creepers, the clinging of the tendrils, the trembling of the grass, the slenderness of the reed, the velvet of the flower, the lightness of the leaf, the quick glance of the fawn, the brightness of the sun's rays, the tears of the mist, the inconstancy of the wind, the timidity of the hare, the vanity of the peacock, the softness of down, the hardness of the diamond, the sweet of honey, the cruelty of the tiger, the warmth of fire, the chill of snow, the chatter of the jay, the cooing of the turtle dove.

All these he combined to make woman. And he gave her to man. And man's days were filled with happiness, for now he had someone to share with him the pleasures of the world.

In the course of time, however, the man came to Tvashti, saying, " Lord, this creature that you have given me makes my life miserable. She chatters incessantly and teases me beyond endurance, never leaving me alone. She requires incessant attention and cries about nothing and is always idle, so I have come to give her back again. I cannot live with her."

So Tvashti took her back. But eight days later, the man was at Tvashti's door.

" Lord," he said, " my life is lonely since the woman has gone. I remember how she danced with me, and how she laughed and filled my heart with pleasure. I remember how she clung to me, and how sweet and comforting was her presence when the sun went down, and the darkness surrounded me."

So Tvashti returned the woman, but a month later the man

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again importuned him. " My lord," he said, " I cannot understand it, but I am sure the woman causes me more annoyance than pleasure. I beg you, Tvashti, to take her away again."

" Go your way and do the best you can," Tvashti answered.

" But I cannot live with her," the man protested.

" Neither," said the god, " can you live without her."

Legend from the Sanscrit, retold by LEWIS K. HILL

Be These Our Days

You are not mine for favour or caress ;
The noisy road is not for us to share ;
For us is no communion unless
In quiet scene and sober loveliness,
Nor anywhere
Beyond these ramparts raised of our delight,
Our twin delight in simple, gracious things,
Does envy beckon us,
Or appetite.

Here none may trespass : of another sort
Life's vulgar pattern. Rather let this be
In skill and warmth no other ecstasy
Than that our undivided care has wrought.
A finer jewel—rich as the content
That waits for us in fair, untrampled ways.
Be these our days,
Our earth, our oceans and our firmament.

In this remembrance here's a trust to keep,
A flame to light each severed interval,
A thread to bind us, waking or asleep,
And if we dream, are there not dreams for all?

WILLIAM BOX

The Greatest Care—

The greatest care in this life, ought to be the choice of thy Wife, and the onely danger therein is Beautie, by which all men in all Ages, Wise and foolish, have been betrayed.

SIR WALTER RALEGH, 1552-1618,
Instructions to his Son and to Posterity

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—*In the Choice of a Wife*

The things which you ought to desire in a wife are, 1. Chastity; 2. Sobriety; 3. Industry; 4. Frugality; 5. Cleanliness; 6. Knowledge of domestic affairs; 7. Good temper; 8. Beauty.

WILLIAM COBBETT, 1762-1835, *Advice to a Lover*

For Mannys Blys—

No thyng ys to man so dere
As wommanys love in gode manere.
A gode womman is mannys blys,
There her love right and stedfast ys . . .
Ne derer is none in Goddis hurde
Than a chaste womman with lovely worde.

ROBERT MANNYNG OF BRUNNE, 1260-1340

Heaven Preserve Her

"Sir—sir, it is a boy!"

"A boy," said my father looking up from his book, and evidently much puzzled; "what is a boy?" . . .

"Lord, sir!" said Mrs. Primmins. "Why, the baby!"

"The baby!" repeated my father, rising. "What! you don't mean to say that Mrs. Caxton is—eh?"

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Primmins, dropping a curtsey, "and as fine a little rogue as ever I set eyes upon."

"Poor dear woman!" said my father with great compassion. "So soon, too—so rapidly," he resumed in a tone of musing surprise. "Why, it is but the other day we were married?"

"Bless my heart, sir!" said Mrs. Primmins, much scandalized, "it is ten months and more."

"Ten months!" said my father, with a sigh. "Ten months! and I have not finished fifty pages of my refutation of Wolf's monstrous theory! In ten months a child! and, I'll be bound, complete—hands, feet, eyes, ears, and nose!—and not like this poor Infant of Mind (and my father pathetically placed his hand on the treatise), of which nothing is formed and shaped . . .! Why, my wife is a precious woman! Well, keep her quiet. Heaven preserve her, and send me strength—to support this blessing!"

"But your honour will look at the baby? Come, sir!" and Mrs. Primmins laid hold of my father's sleeve coaxingly.

"Look at it—to be sure," said my father kindly; "look at it—certainly; it is but fair to poor Mrs. Caxton; after taking so much trouble, dear soul!"

LORD LYTTON, 1803-1873, *The Caxtons*

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THE MOOSE AND RUSTY JONES

Noiseless as a cat the bull came up behind him

by SIR CHARLES ROBERTS

NOT within the memory of the oldest settlers had there been a winter so severe. All the country about the Ottanoonsis and Quahdavic waters was buried under an unprecedented depth of snow. Never before, it was said, had such implacable cold fixed its grip upon the land. Storm piled upon the heels of bitter storm till landmarks were all but blotted out, and the little, lonely backwoods cabins were smothered to the eaves. The scattered settlers gave up, before mid-winter had passed, all effort to keep their road open, and all their necessary travelling was done on snowshoes, tramping their trails seven, eight, nine, or ten feet above the hidden ground. The little trees were submerged from sight, forgotten. The taller spruce and fir towered in snowy domes and pinnacles, except where a rough wind had shaken their branches free of the intolerable burden, and left them standing sharply dark against the wide white desolation.

For the wild creatures of the forest it was a prolonged tragedy, except for those which were so fortunate as to be hibernating, sleeping away the bitter time in their deep holes beneath the snow where the fiercest cold could not touch them. Among the chief sufferers were the moose. These heavy animals, accustomed to select a sheltered spot in the woods for their winter home, and tramp out a maze of narrow pathways all about it leading to the thickets of young birch, poplar, and striped maple, whose twigs gave them their food, found it difficult to keep their paths open.

As the winter progressed, they browsed away all the edible twigs and even the coarser branches of the thickets in their immediate neighbourhood. These consumed, they could only reach further supplies, and these all too scanty, by long and painful flounderings through the smothering depths of the snow. Some of these imprisoned moose families succeeded in getting enough forage to keep them alive, if barely. Others, less fortunately situated, slowly starved to death.

At Brine's Corners, outside Smith's Store—which was also the settlement Post Office—young Rusty Jones, so called from

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the colour of his bristling shock head, was roping parcels, and an oat-bag, a big stone-ware molasses jug, and a kerosene oil tin, securely upon his toboggan. This done to his satisfaction, he pulled on his thick blue home-knit mittens, slipped his moccasined feet into the moosehide thongs of his snowshoes, waved farewell to the little group of loungers in the store, and set out on his four-mile tramp over the buried road to the farm. It was late, already just on sundown—an hour later than he had expected to be. He had waited to get the mail—for there was a story running in the weekly paper (last week's issue) which he was eager to get on with. Now, he thought of all the chores awaiting him at home, which would have to be done before he could get to his reading.

Half a mile down the road a new idea came to him. By striking away from the road, across the valley, on his left, he could save nearly a mile. In ordinary seasons this would have meant no saving, the intervening country being an almost impassable tangle of swamps and deadfalls and dense undergrowth. But now, he reflected, it would be as easy travelling as by the road. Dragging the loaded toboggan easily behind him, he struck off at a long, loping stride through the forest. Boy though he was, he knew that his woodsman's sense of direction and his familiarity with the lay of the land would guide him straight to his destination.

Threading his way through the silent corridors of towering spruce and hemlock, skirting the dense group of tall, slim white birches, avoiding the snowy swells and mounds which meant, to his experienced eyes, traps for his snowshoes, Rusty Jones struck on across the valley till he was within less than a mile of his father's lonely little farm. Then, in the cold, blue-grey, ghostly twilight, he checked himself on the brink of a deep hollow in the snow, half overshadowed by a spreading hemlock, and found himself peering down upon a huddled group of moose. He had never imagined there were any moose within a dozen miles of him. Yet here, in the tangled recesses of the valley, a little moose family had chosen to "yard up" for the winter.

In the gloom of the trodden and littered hollow he made out their forms—a gigantic greyish-brown bull, a dark, smallish cow, and two yearling calves. They were all lying down; but one of the calves, stretched awkwardly on its side, was obviously dead and frozen stiff. The others were all staring up at him with pathetic, hopeless eyes, as if too despairing for fear. But presently the great bull staggered to his feet and stood in threatening attitude, ready to defend his charges to the last, even against the most terrible of all enemies, Man.

Rusty Jones perceived that he was piteously emaciated, the shaggy hide drooping in creases on his flanks. Rusty's kind grey

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eyes clouded with sympathy. "Gee," he muttered, "poor beggars, they're starving, that's what they are!"

He dropped the rope of his toboggan and started off on a run up the slope, remembering a thicket of birch saplings which he had passed a few hundred yards back. Here, with the aid of the long sheath-knife which he carried at his belt, he gathered an armful of the aromatic branches, the favourite forage of the moose.

When he threw his burden down into the hollow the great bull grunted eagerly, the cow and calf got to their feet as if new life already flowed in their veins, and all three fell hungrily to the feast. Rusty hastened to fetch them another armful.

"There," he panted. "I guess that'll do yous fer tonight. I'll bring yous some good hay tomorrow mornin'."

When the boy got home, very late, with his story, he found his father and mother sympathetic enough in regard to the cause of his lateness, but adamant as to his promise of the hay.

"We hain't got more'n enough hay to see our own critters through," said his mother, decidedly. "But maybe father'll let you take some straw. Plenty good enough for them kind."

Bob Jones, a huge, lean backwoodsman, known throughout the settlements, for obvious reasons, as "Red Bob," laughed good-humouredly. "Reckon ye'll hev to chop birch an' poplar for 'em, Rusty," said he. "That's their natural fodder, anyways. But ye're goin' to hev yer work cut out fer yeh if ye're goin' to feed all the starvin' critters in the woods *this* winter."

"That's all right," said Rusty, cheerfully, helping himself liberally to molasses on his pile of hot buckwheat pancakes. "I'll take 'em a bundle o' straw in the mornin', an' after that I'll chop for 'em. Don't worry. I'll see 'em through, all right. If you two had *seen* how pitiful them poor beasts looked, you'd feel jest as I do about it. But of course you're right about the hay. We *hain't* got none too much for ourselves."

Thereafter, for the next few weeks, regularly every other day would Rusty Jones betake himself to the hollow under the hemlock, axe in hand and dragging his toboggan, and leave for his sombre protégés a two days' supply of the twigs and branches which they loved. He found that they preferred this rough fodder to the best cut straw, and even to the few wisps of choice timothy hay which he once brought them as an experiment.

By his third visit the bull and the leggy yearling had become so tame that they would come up and snatch the fodder from his hand with their long, prehensile muzzles. The dark cow, of a suspicious and jealous disposition, was slower to be won; but when won, showed herself more greedy and familiar than the others, pushing

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them rudely aside to try and get more than her share of the titbit which Rusty took to bringing them in his capacious pockets.

Being something of a naturalist, and a keen reader of all the nature stories he could get hold of, Rusty liked to experiment on the tastes of the moose. He found that they liked bread, the staler and harder the better—and corn-cake—and even soggy, cold buckwheat pancakes; while the most tempting gingerbread was scornfully rejected. Sugar they would have none of, but salt they licked up enthusiastically, following him around for more. He tried them with a handful of grain—oats—on a tin plate; but the bull, after an inquiring sniff, blew into the plate a great, gusty breath from his wide nostrils, and the oats flew in every direction.

Oats were scarce and precious, so Rusty did not try that experiment again. But the oats were not wasted; for a pair of saucy, smartly feathered "Whiskey Jacks," or Canada jays—known to Rusty as "Moose-birds"—who frequented the moose-yard, lost no time in picking them up, to the very last grain. Nothing was small enough to escape their bright, confiding, impudent eyes.

Meanwhile the body of the dead calf, rigid and pathetic, had lain ignored in the very centre of the hollow. At last Rusty took notice of it, and decided that it was a blot upon the kindly scene. He decided to get rid of it. Seizing it by the rigid hind legs he started to drag it to the side of the yard, intending to hoist it up over the edge. But the cow, seeming suddenly to remember that this dead thing had been her calf, ran at him with an angry grunt. Startled and indignant, Rusty struck her a sharp blow across the muzzle, and shouted at her with that voice of assured authority which he used with the yoke of oxen on the farm. The stupid cow drew back, puzzled both by the blow and the shout.

To add to her bewilderment the sagacious old bull, who had become as devoted to Rusty as a faithful dog, lunged at her so fiercely with his massive, unantlered head that she went sprawling half-way across the hollow. And there she stood, wagging her long ears in puzzled discomfiture, while Rusty laboriously hoisted the awkward weight and pushed it to the upper level of the snow.

This accomplished, he dragged it a few yards away and left it behind a white-domed bush, where it would no longer offend his vision. Then he went down again into the hollow and stroked the big bull's muzzle, and scratched his ears, and talked to him, and finally gave him a generous portion of salt as a reward for his fidelity. The calf crowded up appealingly and was granted a small lump; and then the cow, forgetting her resentment, came nosing in to claim her share. But Rusty, still indignant at her, would only allow her to lick the last grain or two from his palm.

"That'll larn yeh," said he severely, "not to be gittin' so fresh."

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On Rusty's next visit, two days later, he was at first surprised to observe the numerous tracks of wild creatures on the surrounding snow. The neat footprints of foxes predominated, and the slender trails of the weasels. But there were also, standing out conspicuously, the broad, spreading pad-marks of a big lynx.

Rusty examined them all intently for a few moments, then stepped round behind the shrouded bush to look at the body of the dead calf. The news of a banquet had spread swiftly among the hungry wild folk, and the carcass was half gnawed away. He scratched his red head thoughtfully, and peered about him to see if he could catch sight of any of the banqueters. Some thirty or forty paces away the tops of a buried spruce sapling had been jarred clear of its swathing and stood out sharply against the whiteness. He eyed it piercingly, understandingly—and presently, through the thick green, made out the form of a red fox, crouching motionless.

In a few seconds the fox, perceiving that he was detected, stood up, and stared Rusty in the eyes with a fine assumption of unconcern. He yawned, scratched his ear with his hind paw, flicked his splendid, tawny brush, and trotted away with elaborate deliberation, as much as to say "That, for you!" till he had gained cover. Rusty, who knew foxes, could picture the furry humbug throwing dignity to the winds and running for dear life as soon as he felt himself out of sight.

"Gee," he muttered, "that red beggar's got a fine pelt on him!" He wondered how many dollars it would be worth. He called to mind also those tracks of the big lynx, and wondered what a lynx pelt would fetch. He thought what a scheme it would be to set traps around the dead calf. But this plan he gave up promptly with a grunt of distaste. He had always detested the idea of trapping. Then he thought of his gun—which he used chiefly against the marauding hawks when they came after his chickens.

"Easy enough to get a shot at that red varmin, he's so darn bold an' sassy," he mused, still dwelling on the price of that fine pelt. Then his thoughts turned to the owner of the pelt. He had rather liked the audacious insolence of the creature.

"After all," he murmured to himself, "I guess I won't bother. It don't seem quite fair, when they're all so starved, an' I've tricked 'em all into comin' round here by puttin' out that there carcass. I better let 'em all have a good time while it lasts. An' besides, if I fired a gun here now it would scare my moose out o' their senses."

Having come to this decision he turned back to the moose-yard thinking with a deprecating grin: "But *what* a blame fool father would call me, if he knew! An' maybe he'd be right!"

At last, at long last, the grip of that inexorable winter loosened

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suddenly, and fell away. As the snow shrank, assailed above by warm rains and ardent suns, mysteriously undermined beneath, the tangled undergrowth began to emerge, black and sodden, from its hiding, and the valley became more difficult to traverse. The moose were soon able to forage for themselves, and Rusty's visits to the hollow under the hemlock grew more and more infrequent. They were no longer needed, indeed; but he had become so attached to his charges, and to the sagacious old bull in particular, that he hated to let them slip quite out of his life. It had to be, however; and in this fashion, finally it came about.

One morning, after an arduous struggle, he arrived, wet and exasperated, at the hollow, to find that the cow and the yearling had gone. But there, all expectant, was the faithful bull, who knew that this was Rusty's usual hour of coming. Rusty had his pockets filled with dry corn-cake and salt, and these the bull devoured appreciatively, stopping now and then to nuzzle the boy lovingly with his long, sensitive upper lip.

At last, with a shamefaced grin, Rusty flung his arms about the great animal's neck, and murmured: "Goodbye, you old beggar. Take care o' yerself, an' keep out o' the way o' the hunters when next Fall comes 'round. Gee, what a pair o' horns you must have on that big head o' yourn!"

He turned away rather hurriedly, and started homeward on a longer but less obstructed route than that by which he had come.

He had not gone many paces, however, when he was startled to feel a long muzzle thrust over his shoulder, gently brushing his neck. Noiselessly as a cat the bull had followed him. Deeply touched, but somewhat embarrassed to know what to do with him, Rusty fondled the devoted beast affectionately, and continued his journey. The bull accompanied him right up to the edge of the open, in full view of the farmyard. The farmer was lowering his bucket into the well, and the sharp clanking of the chain rang on the still spring air. The big black and white farm-dog, barking loudly, came capering down the slope to greet Rusty. The bull halted, waving his long ears.

"Better quit now!" said Rusty. "Goodbye, an' take keer o' yourself!"

Not allowing himself to look round he trotted forward to meet the noisy dog; and the gaunt, dark form of the great moose faded back, soundlessly as a shadow, into the trees.

* * *

The English instinctively admire any man who has no talent and is modest about it.

JAMES AGATE

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IN THE MOONLIGHT

Even the Abbé felt a doubt, a vague uneasiness

by GUY DE MAUPASSANT

WELL-MERITED was the name, "soldier of God," by the Abbé Marignan. He was a tall, thin priest, fanatical to a degree, but just, and of an exalted soul. All his beliefs were fixed, with never a waver. He thought that he understood God thoroughly, that he penetrated His designs, His wishes, His intentions.

Striding up and down the garden walk of his little country parsonage, sometimes a question arose in his mind: "Why did God make that?" Then in his thoughts, putting himself in God's place, he searched obstinately, and nearly always was satisfied that he found the reason. He was not the man to murmur in transports of pious humility, "O Lord, Thy ways are past finding out!" What he said was: "I am the servant of God; I ought to know the reason of what He does, or to divine it if I do not."

Everything in nature seemed to him created with an absolute and admirable logic. The "wherefore" and the "because" were always balanced. The dawns were made to rejoice you on waking, the days to ripen the harvests, the rains to water them, the evenings to prepare for sleeping, and the nights dark for sleep.

The four seasons corresponded perfectly to all the needs of agriculture; and to him the suspicion could never have come that nature has no intention, and that all which lives has accustomed itself, on the contrary, to the hard conditions of different periods, of climates, and of matter.

But he hated women; he hated them unconsciously, and despised them by instinct. He often repeated the words of Christ, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and he would add, "One would almost say that God Himself was ill-pleased with that particular work of His hands."

Woman for him was indeed the "child twelve times unclean" of whom the poets speaks. She was the temptress who had ensnared the first man, and who still continued her damnable work; she was the being who is feeble, dangerous, mysteriously troublous. And even more than her poisonous beauty, he hated her loving soul.

He had often felt women's tenderness attack him, and though

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he knew himself to be unassailable, he grew exasperated at this need of loving which quivers continually in their hearts.

To his mind, God had only created woman to tempt man and to test him. Man should not approach her without those precautions for defence which he would take, and the fears he would cherish, near an ambush. Woman, indeed, was just like a trap, with her arms extended and her lips open towards a man.

He had toleration only for nuns, rendered harmless by their vow; but he treated them harshly notwithstanding, because, ever at the bottom of their chained-up, chastened hearts, he perceived the eternal tenderness that constantly went out even to him, although he was a priest.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a little house near-by. He was bent on making her a sister of charity. She was pretty and hare-brained, and a great tease. When the Abbé sermonized, she laughed; when he was angry with her, she kissed him vehemently, pressing him to her heart, while he would seek involuntarily to free himself from her embrace. Notwithstanding, it made him taste a certain sweet joy, awakening deep within him that sensation which slumbers in every man.

Often he talked to her of God, of his God, walking beside her along the footpaths through the fields. She hardly listened, but looked at the sky, the grass, the flowers, with a joy of living which could be seen in her eyes. Sometimes she rushed forward to catch some flying creature, and bringing it back would cry: "Look, my uncle, how pretty it is; I should like to kiss it." And this necessity to "kiss flies" or sweet flowers worried, irritated, and revolted the priest, who saw, even in that, the ineradicable tenderness which ever springs in the hearts of women.

One day the sacristan's wife, who kept house for the Abbé Marignan, told him, very cautiously, that his niece had a lover!

He stood choking, with the soap all over his face, in the act of shaving. When he found himself able to think and speak once more, he cried: "It is not true; you are lying, Melanie!"

But the peasant woman put her hand on her heart; "May our Lord judge me if I am lying, Monsieur le Curé, I tell you she goes to him every evening as soon as your sister is in bed. They meet each other beside the river. You have only to go there between ten o'clock and midnight, and see for yourself."

He began to pace the room quickly, as he always did in his hours of gravest thought. When he tried to begin his shaving again, he cut himself three times from nose to ear.

All day long, he remained silent, swollen with anger and with rage. To his priestly zeal against the mighty power of love was added the moral indignation of a father, of a teacher, of a keeper of

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souls, who has been deceived, robbed and played with by a child. He felt the egotistical sorrow that parents feel when their daughter announces that she has chosen a husband without them and in spite of their advice.

After his dinner, he tried to read a little, but he grew angrier and angrier. When it struck ten, he took his cane, a formidable oaken club which he always carried when he had to go out at night to visit the sick. Smilingly he regarded the enormous cudgel, holding it in his solid, countryman's fist and cutting threatening circles with it in the air. Then, suddenly, he raised it, and grinding his teeth, he brought it down upon a chair, the back of which, split in two, fell heavily to the ground.

He opened his door to go out; but he stopped upon the threshold, surprised by a rare splendour of moonlight.

Endowed as he was with an exalted spirit, such a spirit as must have belonged to those dreamer-poets, the Fathers of the Church, he felt himself suddenly softened and moved by the grand and serene beauty of the pale-faced night.

In his little garden, bathed in the soft brilliance, his fruit-trees, all a-row, were outlining in shadow upon the walk their slender limbs of wood scarce clothed with green; while the giant honeysuckle climbing on the house wall exhaled delicious, sugared breaths which hovered through the warm, clear night like a perfumed soul.

He began to breathe deep, drinking the air as drunkards drink their wine, and walking slowly, ravished, surprised, and almost oblivious of his niece.

As he stepped into the open country he stopped to contemplate the whole plain, inundated by this caressing radiance, and drowned in the tender and languishing charm of the serene night. In chorus the frogs threw into space their short, metallic notes, and with the seduction of the moonlight, distant nightingales mingled that fitful music of theirs which brings no thoughts but dreams, a light and vibrant melody which seems attuned to kisses.

The Abbé continued his walk, his courage failing, he knew not why. He felt, as it were, enfeebled, and suddenly exhausted; he had a great desire to sit down, to pause right there and praise God in all His works.

Below him, following the bends of the little river, wound a great line of poplars. On and about the banks, wrapping all the tortuous watercourse in a kind of light, transparent wadding, hung suspended a fine mist, a white vapour, which the moon-rays crossed, and silvered, and caused to gleam.

The priest paused yet again, penetrated to the depths of his soul by a strong and growing emotion. And a doubt, a vague

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uneasiness, seized on him; he felt that one of those questions he sometimes put to himself was now being born.

Why had God done this? Since the night is destined for sleep, for unconsciousness, for repose, for forgetfulness of everything, why, then, make it more charming than the day, sweeter than dawns and sunsets? And this slow, seductive star, more poetical than the sun and so discreet, that it seemed designed to light up things too delicate, too mysterious, for the great luminary?

Why did not the sweetest of all songsters go to rest like the others? Why set himself to singing in the vaguely troubling dark? Why this half-veil over the world? Why these quiverings of the heart, this emotion of the soul, this languor of the body? Why this display of seductions which mankind never sees, since night brings sleep? For whom was this sublime spectacle intended, this flood of poetry poured from heaven to earth? The Abbé did not understand it at all.

But then, down there along the edge of the pasture appeared two shadows walking side by side under the arched roof of the trees all soaked in glittering mist.

The man was the taller, and had his arm about his sweetheart; from time to time he kissed her on the forehead. They animated the lifeless landscape which enveloped them, a divine frame made, as it were, expressly for them. They seemed these two, a single being, the being for whom this calm and silent night was destined; and they approached the priest like a living answer, the answer vouchsafed by his Master to his question.

He stood stock-still, overwhelmed, and with a beating heart. He likened it to some Bible story, such as the loves of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the will of the Lord in one of those great scenes talked of in holy writ. Through his head ran the verses of the Song of Songs, the ardent cries, the calls of the body, all the passionate poetry of that poem which burns with tenderness and love. And he said to himself, "God perhaps has made such nights as this to clothe with His ideals the loves of men."

He withdrew before the couple, who went on arm in arm. It was really his niece; and now he asked himself if he had not been about to disobey God. For does not God indeed permit love, since He surrounds it visibly with splendour such as this?

And he fled, in amaze, almost ashamed, as if he had penetrated into a temple where he had no right to enter.

* * *

There is never much of a crowd at the narrow gate!

W. R. INGE

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HERBS AND THE HORSE

A miracle? Well, it certainly gives one to think!

by CLIVE BURNLEY

IT'S usually a face powder, a perfume with a naughty name, or a hair wave. Cinderella uses it, there at her place on the conveyor belt in the tin-tack factory, and in less time than it takes to read to the bottom of the advertisement she's married the managing director. You know the kind of thing?

. . . But it does happen. For sure it does! Rose Aldershot found a magic something that did it for her. Not a face powder, perfume, or hair wave. Not at all. What she used was chiefly made up of gallows grease and toads. But it worked.

It's a tricky story to tell. It throws a flood of pretty blinding light on a society scandal, which makes proceedings for libel almost certain, but it's trickier even than that, because it bursts the Official Secrets Acts wide open as well. However, it shows so clearly the advantage of reading every word in the daily newspapers that it well merits the telling as a story with a moral, if nothing else.

Rose Aldershot herself was highly moral. A handsomer housemaid there probably was not in the Home Counties, but for all the gloss on her black hair and the glint in her dark eyes and the beautiful curves her lips made when she smiled—despite all these, she was a housemaid yet, and had no ambition except, perhaps, to marry a chauffeur, or possibly a man who ran a sub-post-office and general store, as her father did in Steeple Bardwell.

Now if this were a world in which there were plenty of housemaids, someone might have thought her fit to be something else; but as, in fact, it was a world in which there were hardly any housemaids, everyone was so delighted at finding one that they never bothered to notice how beautiful she was—with the absolutely incredible result that Rose herself never knew either—and went on pushing a vacuum cleaner around at Cravock Castle profoundly grateful that she could cook, and hoping eventually to land a man with *kromeskics à la espagnol* or fried fillet of rock salmon, according to his taste . . .

The thing that changed her life was a paragraph in a daily paper not so much noted for its paragraphs as for the big letters

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on top of them—a daily paper which filtered through to the servants' hall at Cravock Castle after Major-General Sir Roger Cravock had said "Tchah!" at it, several times, over his breakfast—a daily paper in which, somehow tucked away in columns chiefly devoted to telling the English public what sheep they were, was this single nugget of a paragraph.

To trace the origin of it very far would be tedious, no doubt; suffice it to say that a learned gentleman had recently written a book full of erudition, with a bibliography of nearly a thousand volumes, on the subject of the witchcraft delusion (how could it be anything else?) of past centuries, and the daily paper, which cared nothing for erudition—although it had a weak spot for witchcraft, as witness the horoscopes it published—this daily paper nevertheless published, under the caption of "Housewives' Hints on Greasing Broomsticks," an extract from the learned volume, which Rose read in the mechanical manner of the semi-literate.

It had really nothing whatever to do with greasing broomsticks, for witches use their flying ointment, as is very well known, not to grease their besoms but to anoint themselves, and of the many allegedly genuine surviving recipes for this magic unguent the paper chose, of course, to print the more apparently sensational—the one compounded of gallows grease, dead man's liver, bat's ears, baby's fingers and toads.

Yes indeed, a horrifying mixture, the ingredients of which could plainly have been available only to people like Landru, Gilles de Rais, or Jack the Ripper.

Nevertheless, amazing as it may seem, all these things were readily available to Rose Aldershot. For she had been brought up in Steeple Bardwell, a parish in which there are infinitely more trees than people and gypsies than gentlemen, where a young girl is likely to be less successful collecting pictures of stars of the cinema than flowers of the ditch and hedgerow, which latter Rose did quite assiduously. So that as soon as she read the paragraph in the newspaper she recalled at once the local names which in Steeple Bardwell, and similar villages off the classified roads, were given to several of her requirements. Dead man's liver was, of course, the common rotweed; bat's ears the brown sepals of the cowpansy; gallows grease the wax on the glossy stems of the wodberry bush; baby's fingers, the upright stigmas of the common hogslip . . . while toads were not toads at all, but the large squat leaves of the rosy fogwort.

"I wonder," said Rose Aldershot to herself, and cut out the paragraph, to the bitter disgust of Cheviot, the butler, who thus lost the last three frames of a comic strip he was following on the other side. And she might never have done more than wonder,

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had not the absence of Sir Roger and his aunt, and Cheviot's influenza, soon after, given her a few days of something like leisure, for which reason behold her behind the locked door of her bedroom in the Agincourt tower of Cravock Castle, smoothing on to her lovely body the strange and slightly pungent unction which she had compounded after two days of combing the hedgerows, and feeling every moment more ashamed of her foolishness.

But she had to go through with it now.

The window was opened, showing the blue June night; the handle of the carpet sweeper was between her knees. Timidly she spoke the charm:

Horse and Hattock! Horse and Go!
Vinculum and Vertigo . . .
Stick and Straddle, Neck and Neck,
Zerubbabel, Abimelech!

And a second later she was eighty feet over the West Terrace, nude (which made it rather chilly, for it was a bad summer that year), clinging upside down to the handle of the carpet sweeper (it is more difficult than surf-riding, to begin with) and screaming "Take me back—take me back!" . . . which was instantly done. Otherwise there might have been nothing more to tell.

Her first flight, therefore, was of even shorter duration than Wilbur (or was it Orville) Wright's, but it was no less epoch-making than the cruise at Kitty Hawk, and whereas a less modest person might instantly have 'phoned Bertram Mills or J. Arthur Rank, or at least the learned gentleman who wrote books about witchcraft and by so doing spread the incredible secret as far as radio reaches . . . Rose Aldershot did none of these things, but only thought, when she was composed enough to think at all, of what she could save in bus fares.

By which means the thing remained for eighteen months and four days, suspected by none other, not even within the walls of Cravock Castle.

Cravock Castle had been, and what is really astonishing, still remained, one of the stately homes of England.

It is much more to the credit of the Cravocks than the page and a half they have in Debrett's, or the colourful coat of arms they are entitled to bear, that, having survived very nearly unscathed at the Battle of Hastings, having somehow clawed their way through things like the Wars of the Roses and the Cromwell business, they should still have wit and courage enough to adapt themselves to the twentieth century.

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The last generation had out-sluck the city slickers by making a fortune (all over again) out of potted meats; the present one had attempted to share in what was alleged to be capitalism's dying hand-outs by keeping a large interest in those meats, while at the same time sidling under the state's so-protective umbrella. Sir Roger's sidling had been somewhat interrupted by the war, but as a major-general with a Whitehall staff of about brigade strength he was holding his own, so that, between the meats and the major-generalship, Cravock Castle was still Cravock's castle, and how could it rightly be any other's while the nearest villages were still called Cravock St. Peters and Cravock Monachorum, and the nearest pub the *Cravock Arms*, and the second nearest the *Savage and Basilisk*, after the supporters of those arms?

"We didn't surrender to Cromwell (not actually)" the Major-General was wont to say. "Nor to Stephen or John or Robert de Bellême or the Luddites . . . and I'll be damned if we will to the Ministry of Adulation and Spivvery! . . . An Englishman's castle," he would say, "is his home!"

He was young, for a brass-hat—the consequences of the war and a smart piece of Commando work in the Far East, for the man was just as good a soldier in the field as among the filing cabinets—young, with a strong cavalry nose (if you remember the type), martial whiskers, a fine parade step, and a charming "who-are-you, damn-you?" sort of manner which the Cravócks have never been without.

He had never really noticed Rose Aldershot—which goes to show how little of man's time is spent in an eager search for beauty, despite the volume of literature which exists to prove the contrary—had never really noticed her until the fire, which broke out on a December night after Mrs. Barley the cook had cleaned her yellow flowered dress with lighter fuel and left it in front of the electric fire to dry, so that in a very little while it was dried into a handful of grey ash, and the Agincourt tower of Cravock Castle was smoking from every window.

The nearest fire brigade was at Craftesbury, and although it came as fast as petrol could drive it, clanging its bell the whole way and causing Spud Walker's spotted roan to bolt from St. Peters to Monachorum with Spud hanging under her neck, nevertheless there was a period of about half an hour during which all the household, except Rose, assembled on the lawn to watch the spectacle, being utterly unable to do anything about it. They had been there for some time, saying "Ooh!" now and again like children at a firework display, before Cheviot suddenly realized, and as suddenly said, that the maid Rose was still in her room at the top of the blazing tower.

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Sir Roger's huge and handsome moustaches were that night burnt to a thin wisp, and both his hands were bandaged for weeks after; three times he strove to fight his way up the stairways, and three times he was driven out again. He was frantically helping to lash ladders together on the lawn, although the flesh was burnt off his fingers, when he first really noticed Rose Aldershot.

She leapt—or did she leap?—from her window eighty feet above the West Terrace, and she did not scream, although everyone else did, and when they rushed on to the paved walks of that terrace to find her broken body, it wasn't there. While they were still searching for it, she walked up to them from the darkness of the lawn, with a stick in her hand, and her black hair in gay disorder about her brow, bringing a faint woody perfume—"I'm all right," she said, "I landed on the grass."

It was a miracle.

The Craftesbury men pumped what had been in the moat on to the Agincourt tower; the flames did not spread; and Rose found herself in a new and larger bedroom in the west wing.

The only other incident worth noting during the eighteen months and four days she kept her secret, will be found in Numbers XXI—XXV of the Transactions of the Psychical Elucidation Society. Briefly, the facts were that the son of the man who lived in Cravock lodge was an ardent and quite skilful photographer; on December the 14th, which was one of those rare occasions when quite vivid auroral displays are seen in these latitudes, he took a photograph on a very sensitive plate of the night sky; on the print the aurora was quite unnoticeable and the tops of the cedars behind the lodge very clear; but what was remarkable was that some distance above those cedars a strange dark shape appeared in the picture against the fairly light heavens—a shape that with a little imagination could be made into a human figure crouched over what appeared to be a small dog, which was, of course, absurd. The thing was generally thought to be either a fake or an accident, and young Jim Masters gained unmerited obloquy as a mere trickster.

A fortnight later was the night of the blizzard.

It was piled round about, deep and crisp and even. No Christmas card was so like a Christmas card as Cravock Castle sticking its battlements out of the fifteen-foot drifts that lay on the frozen moat.

Sir Roger was in his study, standing with his back to the great fire that blazed in the great hearth, and Cheviot brought him the whisky he had called for.

"By the way," said Sir Roger, "how's the girl who jumped out of the tower when we had the fire?"

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"Peculiar you should ask me that, sir," said Cheviot, wise as a wrinkled owl, but balder.

"Why peculiar?"

"I was about to speak to you concerning the young woman, sir."

"*Were* you?" said Sir Roger with interest. "Dammittall, Cheviot, isn't she a bit young for you?"

"I had nothing of that kind in mind, sir."

"I beg your pardon—what had you in mind, then?"

"What I had in mind, sir, was that a gentleman in your position, if I may say so, should employ only the most *trustworthy* servants. Your papers, sir, War Office papers, secret, no doubt, sir—highly confidential and of great importance to the state—there should be no possibility of an indiscreet person, or an enemy, seeing *them*."

"I suppose not. *Is* there any possibility, then?"

"Sir," said Cheviot, "I believe Rose Aldershot, the young woman you mentioned—if indeed that is her name—to be a spy."

Well—everywhere is Ruritania today: the cloak and dagger boys are in every back alley. She was certainly suspiciously good looking, for a housemaid.

"And why do you think that, Cheviot?"

So Cheviot told him. And the butler's reasons were these:—

1. Three months ago the woman Aldershot brought to Cravock Castle a toy horse—not a rocking horse but a toy horse on wheels—with a padded leather seat and real horse hair mane and tail. Similar models were on sale in Craftesbury for twelve guineas. Where did she get the money for this?

2. At different times the woman Aldershot had said that she had (*a*) bought the horse for her brother Reginald; (*b*) kept it in memory of her cousin Albert, to whom it belonged, and who died young; (*c*) was keeping it for a woman in the village who wanted to hide it until her son's birthday. The woman Aldershot had shown great annoyance when others had attempted to play with or even to touch the horse. Why? Was it possible the horse contained a miniature transmitting set?

3. Mrs. Barley had said that she had twice seen the identical horse in the spinney behind Cravock St. Peter's village hall when dances had been in progress. Both dances were also attended by the woman Aldershot. Mrs. Barley did not mention the matter to the woman Aldershot, because she was "funny" about the horse, nor did Mrs. Barley touch or move the horse. She would, perhaps, have done so if she had been alone on these occasions.

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Was it possible that the woman Aldershot met another foreign agent at the dances and took the horse along so that radio messages could be sent out as soon as they had conferred ?

4. On two occasions it had been strongly suspected that the woman Aldershot had not been in her room at night. If this was so, where had she been ? Prowling about the castle, looking at Sir Roger's papers ?

5. The woman Aldershot saved her life at the time of the fire by a most remarkable leap. Only a woman trained in parachute jumping, as secret agents frequently were, could have done this. Had she originally arrived in this country by parachute ?

6. The woman Aldershot worked considerably harder and with more apparent willingness than most servants of the present era. Was this because her success as an agent depended on her keeping her place ?

7, 8 and 9 had really no foundation ; they were, in fact, quite slanderous imaginings passed on to Cheviot by no less a person than Sir Roger's aunt, who distrusted pretty faces.

10 and last. This very night Mrs. Barley having, she said, exhausted her supply of aspirins, and knowing the woman Aldershot had some, went to her room to borrow a few. The room was locked and no answer could be obtained. On being told this, he, Cheviot, reluctantly made use of his pass key, entering the room at three minutes past midnight. The bed had not been slept in, the toy horse was not in the room, the bottom half of the window was open, and the room, of course, was empty. A thorough search of the castle had revealed the fact that the woman Aldershot was not in it, although she had not been seen to leave it and had in fact no permission to go out. The countryside lay under deep snow. What just reason could the woman Aldershot have had for leaving the house secretly in the middle of the night—a reason urgent enough to discount the abominable weather conditions ?

" Damned odd, Cheviot, I agree," said the Major-General. " She's got a lover in the village, I suppose. Doesn't seem a steady type, all the same. But she works well, and good workers are pretty hard to come by. As for the horse—who'd ever disguise a radio set as a horse ? " But he was interested. " Got your key ? Let's have a look at her room again."

It was an unpretentious room, and a rather warmer one after Cheviot had shut the window. No swastikas chalked on the walls, not even any lemons to use the juice of for writing invisible letters

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in—if you follow me—only a cheap alarm clock on the mantel, a photograph of a girl in pigtails on the dressing table, and a rosy-cheeked doll tucked up under the bedspread. There wasn't even an exotic perfume—although that depends how exotically you mean exotic—because there *was* a strange woodland smell, very faint and intangible, rather like the odour of cut twigs—it made Cheviot, who had a non-smoker's sensitive nostrils, go yff! yff! like a terrier. And when he discovered that the doll was plainly foreign because it wore wooden sabots, and that the alarm clock had words like WECKER-AUFZUG and ZEIGERSTELLUNG on the back, he was ready to ring up Scotland Yard or M.I. 5 immediately.

"But German alarm clocks are common enough," said Sir Roger, twiddling his fine moustache, and frowning because he was puzzled.

Then the window broke with a great cascade of crashing and tinkling noises, and in came Rose Aldershot astride her piebald twelve-guinea Dobbin with the snow whirling around her and the blood beginning to run out of a long cut across her temple—it shows as the faintest scar to this day—in she came in a shower of broken glass and flying snow, and, crashing to the floor, looked up white and red with shock and bleeding and said very bitterly and distinctly:

"Who shut that *bloody* window?"

Sir Roger was a man of action.

He knew that crises do not wait to be made into slides for the microscope. With a sleight of hand that would have done credit to Billy the Kid or some other American folk hero, a three-eight automatic, very slick and shiny, appeared in his right fist, and he said, in a very slick and shiny sort of voice, "Madame, the game's up!"—which he felt to be an appropriate sort of Bulldog Drummond remark.

Rose stood up, dabbing her head with a handkerchief, and said rather sullenly: "Only went out to post some Christmas cards, sir. Had to get the post, or they'd never have got to Bardwell. And one of them was to Aunt Emily, all the way to Liverpool."

This was obviously too thin to hold water, and Sir Roger did not feel it called for comment. Instead, enjoining Cheviot to keep an eye open for tricks, he examined the toy horse, which was obviously some terribly ingenious one man helicopter—but no amount of examination, not even pulling out the horse hair under its comfortably padded seat, or taking its wheels off, could turn it into anything else but a toy horse, and one, moreover, with a peculiar and rather infuriating leer on its not very equine countenance.

"Madame," said Sir Roger, "you must tell the truth. Lying won't help you. You must tell me—everything."

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So Rose did.

When she had finished, Sir Roger shook his head sorrowfully.

"I'll ring Doctor Paget in the morning. Poor girl—and so young, too. We'll have to find her relatives, Cheviot. Perhaps they won't want her certified."

"Pardon me, sir," said Cheviot, "but, after all, she *did* come in at that window with the horse and—"

"Dammit!" exclaimed Sir Roger. "So she did! Look here, my girl—do you expect us to believe this cock and bull story?"

"No, sir," said Rose, "I don't. And you can take my notice. You slam a window shut in a poor girl's face and neither of you don't have the common decency to go and get some plaster—and me with all the blood running into my eyes. You come barging into a girl's private room waving guns about and if you call yourselves gentlemen, then it's right what the Communists say. I'll sacrifice a week's wages and leave tomorrow, and be shot of the whole lot of you, and good riddance to bad rubbish. There!"

By this spirited outbreak she obtained, instantly, the plaster, a glass of brandy, and an apology. It was the glass of brandy which really made the evening successful. It inspired her to say with a noticeable swagger: "Watch this!"—after which she sat on Dobbin and chanted . . .

Horse and Hattock! Horse and Go!
Vinculum and Vertigo . . .
Stick and Straddle, Neck and Neck,
Zerubbabel, Abimelech!

Zwoosh!—and she was away, doing what used to be called Immelmann rolls over the elm trees in the park. By the time she returned, Sir Roger had definitely abandoned the Drummond-Barton technique. The situation called for altogether different treatment.

"Rose Aldershot," he said, lifting his glass, "To you. To the most accomplished of witches. You know, they never could have hanged as pretty a witch as you, my dear—not even old Hopkins himself."

Rose could understand that, and simmered like a purring cat with pleasure—she could understand that, even if she did think Hopkins was the Family Hopkins Butcher in Cravock High Street—she could understand that; and, indeed, from that moment there began slowly to grow upon her the glorious, ecstatic notion that, perhaps, after all, she might be beautiful—as she was, the lovely witch.

It was an odd party which that night defied the hour in the

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parlourmaid's bedroom in the West or Flodden tower of Cravock Castle—Cheviot, slowly overcoming his guilty fear that this was a Thing of the Devil by feeding his own private devils a slug or two of brandy now and again; Rose Aldershot plunging deeper and deeper into beautiful heady dreams as she realized that the wild and enthusiastic glow in Sir Roger's eyes was not wholly inspired by her piebald twelve-guinea Dobbin; Sir Roger himself vital with enthusiasm about this wonderful thing and saying to himself, "What a witch she is!" with very much the tone and meaning one of his ancestors might have employed—!

She told him everything. What the gallows grease really was. Showed him a cold cream jar full of the product. Explained how broomsticks were difficult and uncomfortable, but toy horses the very thing, although slightly slower.

About three o'clock in the morning Sir Roger retired briefly to Cheviot's room, for decency's sake, anointed himself liberally with the magic unguent, donned a ski-ing suit and goggles, returned to Rose Aldershot's room, bestrode Dobbin, spoke the words and went zwoosh! out into the night—almost certainly the first baronet in the world to ride a toy horse for six and a half miles at an average altitude of three hundred feet, with the help of gallows grease, baby's fingers, dead man's livers, and toads.

It was exhilarating. Over the empty, snow-deep world he whooped and circled, now and again bursting into song, once colliding head on with an astonished owl; over and around the turrets of the castle, the tree tops of the park, the chimney-pots of the village; zooming over the platforms of Craftesbury Junction, where a lonely porter, waiting for a late fish train, was startled out of a life-long temperance, becoming thereafter for many years second captain of the *Cravock Arms* dart team; circling the spire of Cravock church—happy as a lark and as high as a lark, if not so melodious—blithe as a bird and four times as full of geniality—coming again at last into the room where Rose and Cheviot were giggling over the brandy, and rushing upon them, seizing the girl with a gentle violence, kissing her soundly and roundly on the lips, so that his whiskers brushed her nose and made her sneeze.

"My dear girl—forgive me!" he said. "But you don't *know* how wonderful you are!"

The Society scandal began that morning. When Mrs. Barley caught the master coming out of Rose Aldershot's room at six in the morning, dressed in the oddest clothes, dishevelled, with a daub of the reddest lipstick on the blondest part of his whiskers—you could have knocked her down with a feather.

Two months later they were married—with their pictures in

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all the shiniest as well as the dullest magazines. And gossip! But no mention anywhere of gallows grease or piebald toy horses.

That's where the Official Secrets Acts come in. Though there are whispers, rumours about the thing—from Cravock to the Kremlin there are rumours. It's a big thing to keep quiet. It's a big thing when you have six hundred paratroopers drawn up in parade order on one of the loneliest parts of Salisbury Plain, sitting on Corgis—you know those little motor cycles—and crying out together:

Horse and Hattock! Horse and Go!
Vinculum and Vertigo . . . .
Stick and Straddle, Neck and Neck,
Zerubbabel, Abimelech!

and then flying off all at once in perfect formation without any sound of engines and forming fours up in the cumulus clouds; or when you stop making parachutes standard equipment in the Air Force, but grease down pilots thoroughly before they start and leave the rest to witchcraft; or when hundreds of acres of land which could produce heaven knows how many bushels of wheat are suddenly given over to the production of scruffy little weeds like the common rotweed, or the rosy fogwort, or evil-smelling cow pansy—when things like this happen, it's difficult to conceal them altogether.

Sir Roger and Lady Cravock are devoted to one another, their love further cemented by the zeal with which they jointly pursue their scientific work—they are now striving to perfect a formula which will equip the ordinary soldier, in addition to his normal armaments, with the ability to cast the Evil Eye, and another by which they hope to make it possible to liquidate unfriendly aliens at a distance by making little wax models of them and sticking these models full of pins.

They are ideally happy, and I believe the stork is at this moment preening his plumage with gallows grease and all the rest of it, which is exactly as it should be.

So that's the story, whether I swing for it or not. But I do think there's too much secrecy about Armaments, don't you?

* * *

THE INGENIOUS RACONTEUR

Last Autumn's chestnuts, rather passées,
He now presents as marrons glacées.

From PUNCH

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Homestead

I CAME to a long, low farmhouse kitchen, smelling of bacon and herbs and burning sycamore and ash. A gun, a blunderbuss, a pair of silver spurs, and a golden spray of last year's corn hung over the high mantelpiece and its many brass candlesticks; and beneath was an open fireplace and a perpetual red fire, and two teapots warming, for they had tea for breakfast, tea for dinner, tea for tea, tea for supper, and tea between.

The floor was of sanded slate flags, and on them a long many-legged table, an oak settle, a table piano, and some Chippendale chairs. There were also two tall clocks; and they were the most human clocks I ever met, for they ticked with effort and uneasiness: they seemed to think and sorrow over time, as if they caused it, and did not go on thoughtlessly or impudently like most clocks, which are insufferable; they found the hours troublesome and did not twitter mechanically over them; and at midnight the twelve strokes always nearly ruined them, so great was the effort.

On the wall were a large portrait of Spurgeon, several sets of verses printed and framed in memory of dead members of the family, an allegorical tree watered by the devil, and photographs of a bard and of Mr. Lloyd George. There were about fifty well-used books near the fire, and two or three men smoking, and one man reading some serious book aloud, by the only lamp; and a white girl was carrying out the week's baking, of large loaves, flat fruit tarts of blackberry, apple, and whinberry, plain golden cakes, soft currant biscuits, and curled oat cakes.

And outside, the noises of a west wind and a flooded stream, the whimper of an otter and the long, slow laugh of an owl; and always silent, but never forgotten, the restless, towering outline of a mountain.

EDWARD THOMAS, 1878-1917, *Wales*

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TOKAY JENNIE

Exquisite, triumphant — was she not armed against the selfishness of the world?

by M. F. K. FISHER

IT seemed impossible to Jennie that the train from Sacramento to San Francisco could have deteriorated so much by 1882. It was a revolting parody on the plush-hung "silver palaces on wheels" that had begun their run so few years before. The minute it pulled out of town she began to regret angrily that she had not, like most of the other passengers, left its filthy, shabby coaches and taken the boat on down the river.

She looked coldly at the sooty slopes of her brown plaid travelling costume and ran her gloved finger with cruel pleasure over the grit on her cheekbones. Old Harry will have to take me as I am, she thought, and such was her boredom with her physical state that she dwelt teasingly on the possibility that he might well glance once at her and send her packing. Then she shrugged. Not Harry, not after all the money and thought he had spent on her arrival. And Jennie be sent packing, Jennie the princess?

She smiled, confident again in her train-weary mind at least, and opened her hamper for the little silver cup and the bottle of mountain water she had bought somewhere near Trickee from a clean-looking white woman. She would go with them to the horrid closet at the end of the coach, take a final sip, and then pour the rest over her hands, with obvious futility but a sense of pleasant extravagance after the warm, stale water she had tried to wash in for so many days.

When she came back she finished eating the English wafers she had bought in Chicago, and then pushed the hamper and its remnants of chocolate and its little linen napkins and the unemptied pots of meat paste and preserved plums far under her seat. Perhaps, she thought voluptuously, some kind old Negro will find it as he scrubs the corner, and will take it home to his starving piccaninnies, or a kind old Irishman.

She grinned faintly at her rush of sentimentality. Kind old Harry, she thought. He is kind truly, and old truly! He is Harry the English swell, the poor fool, to fall in love so late, too late, with Jennie, so deathlessly young . . .

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As the train slowed in Oakland she leaned back primly against the plush, her face like a smooth stone and her eyes wide and grey behind her veil. She showed no surprise, nor really felt any, when the conductor brought a tall Chinese to stand beside her.

"Got on at the junction, Ma'am," he mumbled with added respect, and went on down the aisle heavy and anxious with duties.

Jennie looked up. "Li?" she asked clearly. "Sir Harry told me of you."

The servant bowed, his hands folded under his wide black sleeves, and his coiled queue like a burned muffin on the back of his copper-coloured skull.

"Li help Missie," he answered, and Jennie felt as sure as she was Jennie that he could speak English better than her own. Some day I shall find out, she decided. Meanwhile she must look no farther into him than he did into her. She handed him all her tickets and baggage papers, and, as she watched him walk lightly down the coach, narrow and tall and like a dry old woman with his bun of hair, she realized that she was almost in San Francisco again.

Her skin crept with an old excitement, and it was as if she held her spiritual breath, waiting to feel once more the Bay beneath her feet, and to smell the hill-torn fog blown eastward from the Gate. When finally she stood forward on the ferry, watching the city come towards her, so big and tumbled now and strong-looking, with the Palace standing up like a square, luxurious giant, she forgot the filthy past days, all of them, the ones on the train and more and more behind those, even filthier.

She saw Li once or twice and smiled to his bow. At the dock she followed him as if she had always done it, through the wild yells of the hotel runners in the ferry shed, out into the ugly cluttered street.

It was typical of old Harry, she thought, that he should wait there for her, massively tweed-hung, beside the little carriage, instead of crossing indiscreetly on the ferry with her. She had forgotten how British he was. It was hard not to smile at his monocle, and at the bareness of his clean-shaved pink skin and his pale, slaty eyes. As she walked lightly towards him through the path the Chinese made for her, she looked with a complete impersonality at the well-rubbed wrinkles, the firmly-controlled tremblings, of the old man who wanted her so insanely. What a clown, deaf and senile, she thought, full of scorn and pride. Look at him, dressed like a young dandy in his London clothes, with his Chinese slave and his pretty little carriage for his fancy-woman!

"My dear," he said, and bent over her hand. "My dear Jennie!"

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She wondered if he would embrace her in front of all the dockside oafs who goggled at this fashionable tableau, but then she was in the carriage, alone.

"I shall hope to see you later today, my dear, with your permission," he said politely through the little window, and its heavy curtains hid him before she could nod yes, or say one word to him in the high clear voice she had coached herself to use against his deafness.

She rode dizzily through the rough streets, blind and exhausted, Jennie always, but now ignorant and almost uncaring of where next she would find herself. Where was Li? Where, in plain fact, was she? Was it tact or disinterest that made old Harry thus desert her? What if he had indeed lost his passion, waiting for her to come across such deserts and over such mountains to be his lady-love?

Jennie smiled again at her foolishness. Was she not Jennie? Who would betray her so? Once it might happen, but not twice, not this time. Now she was armed against the selfishness of the world . . .

The house was small and exquisite and perfumed. Harry was not there. But Li stood waiting, and led her past the rich canopied doorways and up the soft stairs to her apartment, glimmering with rose-embroidered satin and a hundred bevelled mirrors. Jennie shed her hateful clothes and walked naked across the pelts of wild leopards into a room where a bath shaped like a gondola swam in the centre of the velvet floor, a bath filled with more water than she had ever hoped to see again.

Beside it lay a pair of little slippers, like a ballet dancer's, made of polished snakeskin, with dull horny rattlers instead of buckles on the toes. They were incongruous in all the delicacy and perfume of the room. Jennie pushed at them fondly with her foot as she stepped up into the bath: Harry had remembered everything about her. Harry worshipped her in spite of the fact that he sometimes seemed deliberately to make her hate him for the mockery behind his impenetrable breeding, to laugh as if he recognized a joke about her—her—Jennie, that she would never catch.

JENNIE went down to dinner in her own house, calm as any matron, her shoulders and fine little breasts gleaming above peach taffeta, and about her throat a necklace and pendant of yellow diamonds. She felt them like fire on her skin, and like a triumphant fire inside her, so that in spite of herself she warmed, through them, to the passionate note that had been in their box when Li brought it to her. Sir Harry, of many lives and many

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wives, begged to be allowed to dine with her, begged that she wear this welcoming trinket, begged . . .

He stood by the English grate, almost slim in black clothes, his face smooth and ruddy. He had an innate gaiety about him, an insouciance in the face of near senility. Jennie felt excited and amused and grateful all at once, and consummately sure of his need for just such daring as her own.

"Sir Harry," she said, curtseying before him after he had looked silently at her as she came towards him, "you are the most charming man I have ever met." She peeped up at him, a picture of gracious femininity, demure worldliness.

He pulled slowly at his long cigarette and then held out one hand to lift her to her feet again. He was strong and sure and did not let her go. His mouth moved lightly against her cheek and down her powdered throat, and she felt him bite once with a soft nibble at the pendant stone of her necklace.

"And you, my dear Jennie, are by far the most amazing whore that I have ever met." He laughed a little. "You are beautiful, too, my dear. I am proud of you. I think this arrangement will be a delightful one. And now, will you permit me, this first night, to escort you to your own dinner table?"

Jennie felt a familiar mixture of fury and baffled amusement at the old nobleman's manner with her. She put one hand through his arm, and with the other she pulled reassuringly at the diamonds about her throat. He was impossible thus to tease her. No man had ever behaved like this before. Jennie, like a princess, was accustomed to the bent knee, the veiled breathless gratitude of any male who knew her. And now this arrogant, mocking dotard laughed as he looked at her and called her whore as if he paid homage with the word.

Yes, he was impossible: and he was a gentleman who could teach much to her, a libertine to whom even she could teach very little, a cynic who appreciated her ambitions, above all, a man fantastically rich in a city filled with plutocrats.

"Yes, I fancy I'm safe in saying that I enjoy you more than any woman I've ever known," Sir Harry continued pleasantly as he seated her, and Jennie realized that she felt a little that way about him. We are much alike, she thought. We are gamblers. She leaned towards him across the small beautiful table, conscious that anger and excitement had made her cheeks flush and her eyes brighten. I shall tell him, she thought recklessly. I shall let him know that I feel close to him, not quite cold-blooded as I've always thought . . .

"Of course," he went on, holding a decanter up carefully against the candlelight and frowning a little at the deposit from

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the amber-red wine, " of course I enjoy watching a pretty filly more. I have never met a woman yet who could compare with one. Except, perhaps, you, my Jennie. You have the same light-stepping feet—in a clumsier human way, of course."

Jennie laughed helplessly. Li came from behind one of the teakwood screens that made the large dining-room more intimate. Dinner was delightful. There were long white fillets of a local sole. There were grilled truffles from Sir Harry's farm in southern France, sent in olivewood sawdust, he said. There was a haunch of antelope, aromatic as rotting wildflower stalks. Always there was wine in the tall ringing glasses between the candles, and when at last Jennie leaned with schooled caution over a flaming silver bowl of hothouse strawberries, and felt her yellow diamonds swing away warmly from her throat, and touched with respect the crystal stem of another glass, she knew that she was a little drunk.

Harry would never guess it: of that she was sure. She had skirted the edges of inebriation too often and too expertly to let anything trip her now; this night when she must lay all her plans. She held out her glass through the light and let her face glow upward towards the old man's.

" Tokay," he said abruptly, and took the bottle from Li's hands. " Thank you, Li. Good night." The shadowy Chinese bowed and faded behind a screen. " Tokay is your wine, Jennie. We shall serve it always here, in your house. I should like to kiss you."

She smiled at him, knowing that in the clear light from the candles and the fire her skin shimmered, her hair gleamed, her whole body sent out a fog of desirability.

" But I think not," Sir Harry went on, pouring the golden wine slowly into their glasses. " This is Tokaij Aszu, more than thirty years old—fit for you, my dear. I have laid down a good cellar here, most of it this sweet fiery stuff. We must always serve it in your house. It is like you. You are heady as hell. And now—" he rose as slowly as he had poured and stood stonily beside her while his glass touched hers with a small fine ringing note—" now I want to drink to Tokay Jennie."

" Tokay Jennie ? " she asked coldly.

He nudged his glass against hers again, and she sipped in spite of herself. " Yes, my dear. What could be more flattering than for me to call a racehorse after you ? It is the nearest thing I have ever come to a proclamation of love. But I need not tell you that the name is a private one. My filly will wear it, and proudly, but in this God-forsaken outpost you are to be known only as Jennie. The fact that you serve superlative Tokay will be taken as nothing

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more than a proof of my good taste—as will you yourself. The joke is one between the two of us."

She stood up carefully and walked to the fireplace where Li had left two little plush-covered armchairs knee-high with knotted fringe.

"It is apparently time to talk," she said, and as she sat down she wanted to throw her wine into the flames, in outrage and anger at the insolence of Sir Harry's knowledge of her. Instead she sipped and smiled up tenderly at him.

He leaned against the draped mantel for a minute, looking at her fine hair, her skin, her little body, with a dispassionate regret loud in his eyes. He sighed and sat down in sections, older than at any time that day, in the chair across from her.

"Yes, Jennie, Tokay Jennie. Hold out your glass. This wine becomes you. Did I say that?"

She saw his big wattled hands tighten on the bottle, as if he called all his nerves tautly into line against the warmth and the wine and the years, and then his voice sounded firm again and young across the firelight.

"Jennie, you are everything I knew when I first met you. You have carried out all my wishes. Your clothes are perfect. And now what I want you to do is wear them, and more of them made here or ordered from Paris, and act as my hostess. This house is yours. Li will run it for you and will take care of all the marketing and such. He will bring the bills to me. I have purposely not hired a maid for you—they are all gossips in this sprawling village—and one of Li's relatives will care for your clothes. I want you to entertain here for me, in this room and in the cardroom, which you have not yet seen. I refuse to call you my niece, or my sister-in-law, as so many of our lonely citizens find it necessary to do with their mistresses."

"That's plain talk," Jennie said in the high clear voice that was for his ears.

"As always, my dear. Don't bother to act ladylike with me. In public you are an exquisite, well-mannered creature who will never be received socially by the millionaire barmaids and ex-midwives of San Francisco. In private you are the God-honest female who can say what she likes to me and know herself worth ten thousand of the matrons who will spit on her. You are, Jennie. And they will. Your life here will be lonely. The best you can do is strike up an occasional low friendship with the painted lightie of one of my poker-companions."

She shrugged. "I'm not afraid of being alone," she said casually.

"That's one reason you're here. Drink more, my dear. This

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wine is made for you, of small rich, ripe, frost-bitten grapes. It has fire in it." They touched glasses again, and the coals slipped down in the grate. "Lovely, lonely Jennie! But I shall deposit fifteen hundred dollars a month to your own account at the Wells Fargo bank. Here is your cheque-book on the table," and he slapped it down, smiling, among the fruits and the jewel-studded coffee cups. "The house bills will be paid, as I said, by Li. Li has always done that for me. What you yourself must do is be ready to entertain my friends at dinner, to go with me to the theatre."

"What of my costumes?"

"Can you not manage them on that sum?"

"No."

"Then I shall open charge accounts for you tomorrow."

Jennie laughed. "Thank you," she said demurely.

Harry lifted his glass to her, his ruddy, smooth face empty of the mockery in his voice. "And do you think you can take care of your bonnets with fifteen hundred a month, my dear? Or your fans, perhaps?"

"I am doubtful of it," Jennie said. "The theatre calls for so many changes . . ."

"We'll purchase them together, then, after you have been seen a few times with me. And now are you puzzled about anything?"

Jennie touched one hand gently to her forehead among the little curls and let her eyes stray immeasurably beyond the gilt and leather panels of the dining-room. She knew with some faint embarrassment that her pose looked much like a widely distributed postcard picture of a leading actress, but the wine had taken the fine edge off her caution, and at least it was certain that behind her coy histrionic mask her mind breathed with as cold a breath as ever.

"I? Puzzled? Oh, my dear Harry, you have been so thoughtful! But your friends—who are they? Will I be able to entertain them fittingly?"

Sir Harry stared delightedly at her for a full minute and then tossed down the wine in his glass with a snort of amusement. "Fittingly? You? My dear Jennie, they have seen nothing like you since they left their—in San Francisco we are careful not to inquire where people came from, which is one more reason for your own inevitable success here, but I can assure you that my companions in racing and poker, at least, will appreciate every move you make—as my hostess, of course."

They looked thoughtfully at each other. "Li is my confidant as well as my steward," he said at last, and there was soft silence in the room.

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Jennie slid forward on the stiff whispering silk of her train and lay against his knees in the firelight. "Your friends shall be my greatest concern," she promised in a murmur that made him bend close to her. "I shall do whatever I can to please them, Harry."

She laid her head like a child against his hand, so that even when he kissed her he could not see the triumph and the ferocious excitement in her wide grey eyes. Jennie was busy, once having caught the scent.

"Yes, I shall try to make them happy," she swore gently.

THE intricacies of Sir Harry's presentation of Jennie to San Francisco were a constantly amusing game to her. Each night he would give her directions for the next day's moves, like a chess master instructing his pupil: she might shop from eleven until one, wearing her grey taffeta costume with the sealskin sacque, no jewels, and no veil; at three he had arranged for Madame Jamison to come to give her a fitting for her new riding-habits; there would be five gentlemen for dinner at eight-thirty, with poker later.

Or he would call for her at four o'clock and take her to look at the new imported laces at Newman and Levinson's, and bow ironically to the fat, curious ladies who smiled at him and stared angrily at her over their high trussed bosoms.

Or on Sundays they would go dashingly through the sandy, wind-swept Park in his shiny flyer, to the Figure-Eight Drive, where Jennie knew by the glances of other beautiful women sitting beside their "gay blades" that her ankle-length skirts and her little Homburg were the most stylish within five thousand miles of the Golden Gate.

Gradually the blades began to bow to her, their hostess of the week before. Jennie smiled, and let her hand rest with discreet implication on the crook of Sir Harry's formidable length of arm, and looked through the blades' companions as if they were fog, knowing herself to be the same.

Familiarity with loneliness had bred a fine contempt for it in her, and she found her days too short. She grew to enjoy Li's midmorning consultations, along with all the other diversions: he told her in his thin, high voice what each night's menu would be, and gourmande Jennie learned dishes she had never dreamed of.

"Do you Chinamen eat ground squirrels, Li?" she once asked teasingly, and he said, "Railroad coolies, perhaps, Miss. But Li eat abalones."

"Li, get abalones for me," she begged.

That night they were served, and the rich white gentlemen who ate them in Jennie's warm dining-room were as excited as children with forbidden sweets. Sir Harry praised her for her

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daring, and Jennie looked at Li, and smiled, and led him on to find other Chinese delicacies among the local inedibles for her, so that her exotic little banquets grew to be talked of in the Clubs and in the *Russ House* bar.

"Li, let the pedlars come up here," she asked once, sure that he would not, but the next day into her rose-silk room two short Chinese stepped with little bows and cluckings, and spread squares of yellow cotton on the carpet, and Jennie bought porcelain cups and a box of silver-lacquered wood with twenty tiny drawers inside it, and some powdered sandalwood. When they stood up and tied their yellow bundles neatly again, they left little presents for her: incense, a tight grass basket packed with rose tea, carved black chopsticks.

Once a silk merchant came, and she bought lengths of cloth as delicate as moonlight, with poems woven into the edges. And once she sniffed at a wee box of white powder held out to her, and Li caught the pedlar a cruel blow across the head and kicked him moaning from the room, with never a word to Jennie afterwards about it.

For a while there were no more such scented visits, but still Li told her when the men with flowers and fish and vegetables came, and she stood in the pantry watching through the door and laughed like a child at the singsong haggling. He paid for the fresh, clean food, as he did for her silks and teacups, from some bottomless pocket under his black robe, and bowed a little more deeply to her, his eyes invisible, when he gave her the flowers or the beautiful grapes or the polished sea shells that the men left as their thank-offerings.

Jennie went back to her soft carpets regretfully after those noisy meetings, and found herself pretending new reasons for Li to consult with her, drawn as she was by his silent intelligence. It was, perhaps, her one admission that she needed anyone other than herself and Sir Harry in the town of shut doors and shut faces. Certainly she preferred Li's almost affected pidgin English to the artificialities of one or two women she went shopping with, girls Harry always referred to as lighties.

She called for them in her little carriage, very properly, and they exchanged ladylike chitchat about nothing, and walked primly up and down the fashionable Kearney Street, looking in the shop windows, and went to the Viennese bakery for coffee and little frosted cakes, just as if they lived on Nob Hill and were not well-paid refugees from the red-light district.

Then Jennie took them to their charming little houses, so much like her own, and when they met a few nights later in her drawing-room they laughed with gay shrugs and grimaces at the provincial

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amusements of San Francisco, and Jennie looked at them over her glass of Tokay and loathed them, and Harry for forcing her to entertain them. She never loathed herself, being Jennie.

Once she went with Harry to Dupont Street, and there was Li standing in a doorway waiting for them, and they drank tea and listened to girls sing, and bought spinach jade.

And, of course, there was the theatre often, with Jennie blazing in a new costume every night, sure of Harry's pride in her. One time she wore stuffed humming-birds from the Amazon wired into her hair and the shoulders of her gown, so that they trembled and fluttered as if they were alive. Every opera glass in the dress circle fixed on her, and she lifted her head high, tiny princess Jennie.

Life grew gayer. There were parties, late ones, when Harry would call for her after a ball on the Hill and take her with some of the giddier guests from it to the Poodle Dog or Marchand's, and Jennie would listen to talk of the evening's splendours and despise the fat snobs who had not dared ask her to share them. She drank a great deal of champagne, glad to escape from the rich nightly rounds of her own Tokay, and Li without consulting her had the old Negress Liza Bellamy come and bathe and rub her with her famous restorative unguents after such parties, so that by noon Jennie felt calm and smooth again.

Dark Liza knew every courtesan in San Francisco, and most of the snobs, too, and it was fun to talk with her. She told Jennie things about the gentlemen Sir Harry brought there. She gave Jennie powders and salves now and then, all magical, and Li paid for them. Jennie felt that she had two allies, both tacit, a Chinese steward with a pigtail rolled on his skull, and an old coloured woman in a white starched sunbonnet. She lay purring under the bony hands that smoothed at her so sensitively, and was certain that when she asked Li to put this or that powder of Liza Bellamy's into the coffee or the wine, he would understand her.

The first time she used one, except on herself, was the night she knew Marc Raphael would ask her to leave Sir Harry for his own equally unlimited fortunes.

He had looked seriously at her with his long dark eyes over several dinner tables, and she knew increasingly as she passed near him with the carved box of fine cigars, before she left the gentlemen to their cards and whisky after one of her little banquets, that he planned a move to get her. She wondered how he would do it, there so close to old Harry's lordly nose.

His final attack was audacious. "Harry," he said abruptly, as Jennie turned to leave the room to her guests and sink happily into the gondola of warm perfumed water she knew awaited her

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upstairs, " I've seldom pretended to be a gentleman, but, by God, I shall have to stop coming here as long as you disturb me with your lovely lady."

Harry looked up from the cards he was arranging. His face was smooth and ruddy as ever, and his voice showed only a trace of the intolerable tolerance Jennie knew was there.

" Marc, old boy, you're gentleman enough for these parts," he observed.

The young man bit at his lip, and then, miserably unmanned by a man old as his grandfather, stared full at Jennie.

She looked away.

The other men humphed and harrumphed uneasily, while Sir Harry tapped at his cards and rubbed one speckled old hand gently against his beak.

Jennie turned with a little rush of lace and silk petticoats and clicking satin heels and ran to her apartment. Now was the time, she knew, to try what Liza Bellamy had whispered to her. From the silver box with twenty tiny drawers she took a brown cigarette paper folded small as a pea, and then she ran down again into the pantry.

Li stood there, ready to leave, as always, at ten each night for his own pleasures. He looked at her and past her, and when she said, " Another bottle of wine before you go," he brought out one of the oldest Aszus as if he were waiting for her request, and she was not surprised to find it uncorked. He put glasses on a tray and then stood back against the door to the outside, his hands in their sleeves and his eyes covered with his bird-eyelids.

" Good night, Li," Jennie said slowly. She turned from him, so sure that she would hear the door close that she did not consciously listen, and equally sure that if she did listen she would never hear him walk down the boarded path to the street.

In a minute, thoughtfully, she unfolded the little brown curd of paper in her hand and tipped its powder into her palm. Then she picked up the silver tray with the bottle and all the glasses on it and carried it as if it were a sea shell down the long warm hall and to the cardroom.

The men sat almost as she had left them, and looked up with jovial relief when she stood in the doorway. Harry still tapped at the clean cards. Marc Raphael still stared miserably at her, as if his eyes had never left the spot where he had last fixed them upon her.

" My dear Sir Harry," she said softly and let the tray tip a little, as if unbearably burdened. At that they all sprang towards her, except the old Englishman who still sat on, smoothly. Raphael caught the tray an instant before it seemed ready to crash, and

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Jennie swayed exhaustedly into the room and leaned against the thick brocade and gold fringe of the mantelpiece lambrequin. Harry looked impersonally at her, and she felt angry enough to hit at him, and yet cool because of the powder in her hand and what dark Liza had said it would do. Harry is a fool, she said to herself. She smiled at him, and he smiled back, prompt lover.

"Tonight I felt—I felt with all of you here," she said, making a circle with her little hand to draw each fat, overstuffed adventurer nearer to her, "that I was back in Buda-Pesth—Sir Harry, you remember?—I felt that we were gay again, and young . . ." She looked like a homesick, troubled child.

Harry rose at last. "I, too, Jennie," he said. "Jennie, my dear friends here in this magnificent outpost, shall we drink to an older civilization?"

Jennie trembled with rage. He was overplaying it in such obvious mockery of her that even these fools would see.

But they bowed humbly over their glasses as Harry reverently poured the gold liquor, and then she gave one to each man, and Harry and his whole crew lifted them to her, tiny, exquisite, and she smiled a tiny exquisite smile to reward them. Marc Raphael, young and dark and troubled, drank down the Negress's powder with the wine and stood back politely, feeling somewhat assuaged. Jennie bade the room a gentle good night and retired contentedly to her gondola of tepid but still perfumed water.

It would take about twenty-four hours, Liza had told her.

JENNIE always slept like an untroubled child, but it seemed to her that she had never felt fresher nor more rested than she did the next morning, as she talked happily from her nest of pink ruffled pillows to Li.

He stood like a thin white cotton post with a carved nob on top, his hands hidden, while he told Jennie of the night's menu. There would be eight gentlemen, Sir Harry had told him.

Jennie smiled. There would be one, she said surely to herself.

Sir Harry wished a full dinner, Li went on, with a buffet Russe beforehand and both game and roast.

There would be a light supper, Jennie said silently, of oysters, grilled quail perhaps, and a soufflé.

Sir Harry wished both white and red Bordeaux and a red Burgundy to be served, with Tokay and liqueurs and later his own Scotch.

There will be champagne, Jennie went on to herself while she smiled at Li and nodded, and later there will be more champagne.

She discussed the way Li had last served venison and agreed with him that it might be better to substitute a roast of beef in the

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English style tonight, and a clear soup after the buffet instead of the rich creamy one Sir Harry always wanted. And instead of a Roman punch after the roast, why not serve a well-chilled salad of chicken with mayonnaise, to lighten the pattern of the meal? Li bowed approvingly. The fish would be sole, of course, and could he not make an aspic of the little Bay shrimps to follow the salad and precede the game? Li bowed again.

Jennie went on, almost breathless with amusement at the game she played, and decided that a pudding of apricots served with an egg cream could easily be followed by one of Sir Harry's required savouries, tonight made with anchovies baked in little puff-paste cases. She checked the plan once more, agreed with Li that the tiny local shrimps would be a sensation among a group of gentlemen who thought that all shell fish must come in tins from the East to be socially acceptable or even edible, and then she lay back, waiting in her pillows for word to come that the dinner must be postponed, as she knew surely that it would be, because dark Liza herself had made the little powder . . .

At noon a messenger arrived with a sealed packet from Colonel Andrews' Diamond Palace. "Wear these tonight!" begged the perfumed card that lay upon the parure of topazes, and so sure of her plans was Jennie that she was surprised for a second that it was Harry who had sent them. She smiled and waited.

Li's cousin came and carried away a great wicker box of clothes to be freshened. Mademoiselle Alice called in person to say that a new shipment of bonnets from Paris was at that very moment being unwrapped and would be ready to view the next day. Jennie experimented with a pomade that promised to improve her bust magically, and then washed it off what could obviously not be bettered, even by coconut milk and whatever unnamed ingredients the nostrum contained.

By then it was three o'clock, but she was unruffled.

Fifteen minutes later, as she read the advertisements in a month-old copy of the *New York Times*, Li knocked at her door, and she knew before he spoke that the dinner party was postponed. Sir Harry sent all his apologies: unexpected business in Los Angeles . . . return in six days . . . reach him care of Mr. Baldwin at Santa Anita if necessary . . .

"But the gentlemen who are invited for tonight?" Jennie asked, putting one hand to her forehead like a proper little housewife, and staring up anxiously from under her curls, while inside she smiled with delight.

"Sir Harry tell, all gentlemen say all right, come next week."

"But the dinner, Li! All your beautiful food!"

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" Li fix. Missie have little supper, maybe. Li rest, maybe go Dupont Street. Missie all right." He bowed and left her.

Jennie could finally laugh aloud. She felt gay and excited, like an actress who knows that she is playing her best part better than anyone else could ever do it. She called Li back into the room and asked him to go for dark Liza; since she would be alone tonight, it seemed wise to rest completely and have a massage, an oil bath, a " treatment."

Li nodded wordlessly, and within a few minutes brought the old woman to the door. Jennie smiled into her dour face, framed in the starched white sunbonnet that none had ever seen her untie and take off.

" Did you do what I told you to, Jennie ? " she asked severely, like a teacher.

Jennie nodded.

" Sir Harry is gone away, then, as I told you he would ? "

Again Jennie nodded, her wide grey eyes dancing.

Liza tossed her head. " You see ? I tell you a thing and all you have to do is believe me, Jennie, because what I tell you will always happen. I have powers unnatural to white people, unnatural to most people in the wide world, I tell you."

She sounded as if she were scolding. Jennie nodded like a child to her phrases and, reaching out, she pulled the old woman's hand to her and rubbed her cheek softly against it.

" Now I tell you to make yourself ready, Jennie," Liza went on as if she were lecturing instead of pouring a full pitcher of happiness into the other woman's heart. " I tell you to trust me and make yourself ready, whilst I go down and confer and consult and decide with old Sir Harry's Chinaman; and then I go out to deliver a certain message to a certain white man."

She pulled her hand austerely from Jennie's soft, loving grasp, and tightened the starched bow of her sunbonnet. " There is still much to be done. But trust Liza, Jennie. So get off that sofa and set yourself to rights. I shall return before you know it."

By the time Li came in to light the lamps, Jennie was bathed and sweet smelling, in a peignoir edged with ermine. He wore his street clothes. At the door he turned and said in his thin, high voice, " Li go tonight to family funeral. Liza stay here. Li fix little supper, two people, Missie and Liza maybe. Fine oysters all ready, quail, Liza make soufflé."

He turned to go. Jennie held her breath, waiting for one more thing to happen as it should, and he said as the door closed, " Missie sad alone maybe, so champagne in ice-chest."

Jennie kicked her feet recklessly high over her head as she fell back on the sofa and laughed like a boy, looking up at her gleaming

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little toenails and thinking of the pinch of powder, ram-horn ground in the moon's full, perhaps, and of the way it came when and as and how she needed it.

At eight o'clock Marc Raphael was shown into the rich dining-room, where light from the little English grate shone on the leather and the carved wood and on the glasses set just so upon the damask cloth. Dark Liza summoned Jennie, who came down like a golden cloud, with topazes from Harry in her ears, her hair, her half-bared bosom, topazes in a heavy circlet about her golden throat.

"Mr. Raphael," she said softly, as if the sight of him were almost too much for her credulity. She made a low curtsey, and he dropped his elbow sharply from the draped marble mantelpiece and brought his slim heels together in a bow that betrayed heaven knows what hidden background of student-corps and duelling-school precision.

"Mr. Raphael," she sighed again, lifting her wide eyes to his face, and he flushed.

"Jennie—the old woman sent word to me—I am your guest tonight." He bent slowly to her, and she let herself be lifted, light as a golden feather, into the avid circle of his arms.

The next afternoon Liza informed her of what had been deposited that day to her account at Wells Fargo, and Jennie in turn handed another cheque to her ally and then put pomade delicately upon her lips for her rendezvous with Marc Raphael at Mademoiselle Alice's bonnet shop. Once there, she made it plain that a wager was to be paid off, a strictly decorous gaming debt, and she let him pay for three mounds of maline and gauze and feathers, which she watched the apprentices pack into round paper boxes for her. Then she and Raphael walked out into the foggy dusk, two separate human beings.

Once outside, she put her tightly gloved hand for a second on his arm, time enough to feel him start away from it.

"May I come?" he asked with the voice of a hoarse boy.

But Jennie knew better than to nod yes, for had not Liza told her. "You? Tonight? To my house?" Her voice was incredulous, and she made a birdlike mocking sound. "My dear Mr. Raphael! I hope to see you sometime next week, for dinner—Sir Harry will tell you the night. This has been delightful. And if you will please see me into my carriage . . ."

The young man, his eyes veiled and his face anciently polite, bowed her away, and then stood for several minutes in the filthy gutter mud thinking of her sweet cries in the night, before he walked stolidly to his club.

Jennie, on the other hand, unwrapped the bonnets happily

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in her rose-silk apartment, and then looked once, very quickly, at her cheque book before she climbed into the gondola full of water. That night she pulled her hair back from her forehead and oiled herself with honey-and-almond balm.

In the morning Li appeared, as if he had never been gone two nights to a family funeral. "Sir Harry telegram, only to Santa Maria. So eight gentlemen for dinner tonight, late, for dinner party," he said, bowing. "Missy think shrimp good after the chicken mayonnaise, like other day?"

Jennie sighed. Already she could taste the Tokaij Aszu under her tongue, and feel Harry's mocking eyes slatily upon her. "Liza has gone, then?" she asked.

"Liza?" The Chinese shrugged a little. "Missie think maybe a mousse of vanilla, no apricots?"

JENNIE wore her topaz parure to the dinner that night, and there was no more explanation of a little red kiss-bite on her throat than there was of Sir Harry's sudden return from Santa Maria, less than half his announced journey away from her. He was smooth-faced and suavely laughing, and she was, if possible, more charming than she had ever been.

The eight gentlemen turned their heads towards her as if she were their sun, while Harry smiled, and Jennie guided the talk to the hunting in the antelope valleys in the south, and got a promise of game for her table such as no African queen had ever seen. Two weeks from tonight, she promised, her head high behind her glass of Tokay, two weeks from tonight a soft omelet with antelope tongues wrapped in the eggs, and Sir Harry's truffles from Provence minced finely among them! The gentlemen's eyes glistened and searched out her stone-crowned breasts. Jennie laughed and tilted her wrist high under its bracelet when Harry nodded heavily to her and gave a toast in French, his slate eyes dancing.

But later, alone, he was, as much as he ever could be or had been, her slave. She hated him, and made him dance before her, and then suddenly forgave him and fell sobbing prettily into his still powerful arms, while her mind crept with the memory of Horace James the shipper, who had stared at her since he first came into her house that night. He was a new one. She must ask dark Liza tomorrow. Meanwhile she drank more Tokay and laughed when Sir Harry solemnly poured a little from his glass into her mouth.

Horace James, said Liza, was from Philadelphia, at least lately. The girls told her he was mean. They said he knew a lot of things.

Jennie lay quietly under the black hands, listening, and in two weeks when the gentlemen smacked their way through the great

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soft fine omelet studded with tender tongues, she let James stare at her until she saw Sir Harry watching the two of them. She smiled and then looked back into the small hard eyes of the shipper.

The next time he came she put one of the powders, spilling out tight as a brown pea from its paper, into his Tokay. Within a few hours Harry started suddenly for Sacramento, and Liza came and Li disappeared, and Jennie and the shipowner spent three days together, mostly in her apartment, but also in one indiscreet, beautiful ride through the Park towards the fog-bound sea, with the horses' hooves invisible and even the granite face next to Jennie's own soft one acceptable for once. Home again, Jennie made toast in the grate and warmed a ragout Liza had left for the two of them.

The next morning the coloured woman stood beside her bed, and Jennie looked contentedly at her deposit book and signed a cheque for Liza, and turned over and slept like a child until Sir Harry stood in Liza's place, his face travel-thin and his grey-white eyes mocking and hungry.

There was a pause then: Jennie felt a profound satisfaction at the state of her bank account, with no need to work for once. She kept on buying finer and finer jades from the Chinese who came up especially from Dupont Street, and now and then she let herself fall into the pleasurable trap of an ordinary pedlar, who might show to her a wee enamelled singing bird in a cage lacquered with kingfisher feathers, or a five-panelled screen no bigger than a tooth-pick case.

Li paid for all such toys, and dark Liza rubbed and soothed her daily with never a word of pay. Jennie let herself grow whiter, softer. Even the Tokaij Aszu tasted good again, and when Harry told his interminable stories of leopard hunts and jungle-beaters she smiled gently at him. It was a kind of Indian summer, full and fallow.

EVERYTHING changed, as it must, when Jennie almost fell in love. That was with Coll Hemingway, who was younger than she and owned more pretty horses than Sir Harry. He wore black uptilted moustaches, like a Prussian, but, even so, the French colony in San Francisco loved him for his good Parisian accent and his taste in claret and jewels and the women who wore them.

Jennie knew poignantly that on his arm she could enter drawing-rooms where no other man would be able to take her, and for the first time in her life social implications became entangled with her purely sexual plans. She dreamed of leading a cotillion, of standing in a receiving line when a young girl made her debut, of bowing on

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Sunday afternoons to other ladies, *other ladies*, in Golden Gate Park.

"Coll, darling," she dreamed she would say, looking up at him from the Dresden teacup in a Nob Hill music room, "Coll, darling, let's tell them our plans for next summer in Bad Nauheim. . . . Yes," she would drawl among the white marble and mirrors of Colonel Andrews' showroom, "have the tiara sent to Mrs. Hemingway, at the country house in Burlingame . . . Oh, Coll," she would say from his lean black-haired arms, for she was still Jennie even in her dreams, and all of them ended properly in bed or at least upon a silken sofa, "Coll . . ."

Dark Liza looked dourly down upon her as she lay feverish and tearful in the rumpled pillows. "I tell you, Jennie, and you listen well to me, that you are acting very foolish. You can't play with what I tell you to do and give you to do with, that's all. You use my medicine properly, and what happens will happen. But you can't change in the middle of the happenings, Jennie. Have I ever failed you? You tell me that, now."

Jennie shook her head and tried to look away from the proud old woman.

"No, I have not. Haven't I always made Sir Harry leave you, and then told you when he would be coming back?"

Jennie nodded, pouting.

Liza drew herself up taller and spoke even more sternly. "Well, you remember all that and behave yourself with gratitude, then. I tell you Sir Harry is in Sacramento for at least two more days. You have two more days with Hemingway. Enjoy them, I tell you."

"But that's it, Liza—two more days! I want him every day, always!"

The Negress snorted. "Isn't any charm in the world, Jennie, can get you that! You shake these notions out of your head now and have some more pleasure! Anyway, my medicine makes the gentlemen want more, doesn't it? Mr. Raphael still comes back, doesn't he, begging at your very bedside? Mr. James still begs at your very bedside, doesn't he? Well, you see if Coll Hemingway doesn't arrive to join them!" She laughed fiercely. "They are your slaves, I tell you right here and now, Jennie."

"But that's it, that's it," Jennie moaned. "I don't want a slave. I want Coll Hemingway, the man Coll, all of him."

"You are acting very foolish, Jennie, I tell you. A girl like you will always have slaves, and there's no way to change it, no charm even I could make for you. Mr. Hemingway will come back, and he will make your bank book look finer than you ever dreamed of, Jennie, but you get any silly notions out of your head, is all I can

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tell you. Here"—she turned her back on Jennie and felt deftly up under the brim of her sunbonnet—" here's a little sweet powder. You take it and rest, and you will be so pretty tonight you will forget all about these silly notions."

She put the medicine in water, watched sharply while Jennie drank it, and then rinsed out the glass and went to the door. " You can have almost anything in the world if you do what I tell you and use what I make for you to use—almost, I say!" She tossed back her head with a proud, angry laugh, a puff of laughter, and she left.

The next day was the same: fevered regretful dreams in the morning, and then one of Liza's powders and a night full of excitements and satisfactions. And on the third morning when Jennie wrote a cheque for her witch and saw from what newly-fattened sum she drew it, she lay back smiling, sure that Coll Hemingway would not forget her, even though he might never lead her across the Palace ballroom on his arm.

Li and Sir Harry returned within a few minutes of each other, as usual, laden with gifts. Jennie fingered the necklace of carved coral hung with pearls and listened to the draymen bring in cases of new Keller wines from Los Angeles, and smelled the delicate perfume of the fine tea the Chinese servant brought to her in a milk-green cup sent by his mother from Canton.

She was seen more with Sir Harry for a time and went often to the races with him, to watch her colours of rose and gold come home first. He brought a jockey from Chicago to ride Tokay Jennie and no other horse, and when they stood up at the finish more glasses were turned on the famous pretty woman than on the filly named for her.

Jennie smiled through the cold stares of the ladies and held out her little gloved hand like a princess, a queen, to the bloods and the fat bankers who bent over it. Her costumes grew more exquisite as Sir Harry's pride in her demanded new proofs of his skill in picking horses and mistresses, and Jennie began to wear some of the jewels other men had given her, sure of the old Englishman's blind pleasure at the sight of her.

As for her generous lovers, she called back James and especially Marc Raphael whenever Harry left for Santa Anita or the horse-trading in Sacramento, to help her forget the nagging fever Coll Hemingway always left her in. And dark Liza helped her add two more to her list, the rich young Spaniard Sanchez from San Diego County and a banker, Hemingway's partner in the city. Jennie felt full of power and confidence. She gave Liza a bonus once, and kissed the thin, skilful black hands, and wished there

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were some largesse in the world that she could pour out upon her other ally, the pig-tailed steward of her house and destiny, Li the Chinese.

ONE day Sir Harry came earlier than usual to her apartment. Li knocked at the door of the smaller room, where Jennie dried herself after her bath. "Master here," he said in his clear voice. "Master wait."

There was nothing to do but hasten, a thing Jennie despised. She patted a touch of a new embellishing-wax upon her throat, just for the fun of it, and to see what liars the newspapers could be, and then with a smile at herself snapped on a high collar of garnets and gold. Marc Raphael had given it to her the night before he was married and tried to drive his rockaway over the cliffs near the beach. She thought of his bandaged head as she had last seen it at the races, and his bitter pale face beside his bride's. The necklace felt good, heavy and solid and full of worth.

Jennie put on her lightest corsets, the ones with the rose-coloured silk lacings that Harry loved to tighten for her, and a thin peignoir. She rubbed some attar of roses, a grey gritty salve sent from gardens near Nice in France, under her arms and upon her nipples and earlobes, and then walked with a completely natural regality into the other room.

Harry stood, a Gibraltar-like bulwark of unconventional tweed, upon the hearth. Behind him the little fire crackled, and Jennie could smell the dried flower petals Li always put upon it at this hour. There was a tray on an inlaid table before her sofa, with two glasses on it and the dread familiar shape of a bottle of Tokay.

"Dear Sir Harry," she murmured, close to his massive old ear.

"My dear little Jennie," he said in a matter-of-fact voice and with a fleetingly passionate caress of her breast. "My dear Jennie—I say, shall we have a talk? It's about time, you know. I mean—well, you've been here several months now and all that."

"Oh, for God's sake, Harry, stop chuffing and huffing!"

He stared at her like a wounded lion through his monocle and then put back his handsome head and roared with delight. "By God, Jennie, but I adore you," he said finally, as if with that statement he conferred on her a celestial order of merit complete with wings made of diamond-dust. "Chuffing and huffing!" He gazed jauntily down at her. "That's what it must be, my dear. I'm broke."

Jennie listened to the flower petals crinkle into ash on the coals and felt the attar of roses burn under her arms. Her corsets were unfamiliarly loose. "Harry," she cried out sweetly in the high

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voice made for his deafness, and she lifted her peignoir, and the old man bent over her, pulling and tugging discreetly, his eyes everywhere but on the fine embroidered places for the strings to go.

"What did you say, you beast?" she asked softly a few minutes later.

He shook his head helplessly. There was a little silence, and then Sir Harry pushed her from him and sat down with a thump upon her rose-satin slipper-chair.

"Yes. Yes, that," he said at last. "Jennie, my dear, I need some money from you. I hate like the devil to ask it, but my cheques from London are slow in coming—slower than usual this month, unfortunately—and I can only tell you that I'll put back twice what I—what I must borrow from you."

She touched one finger delicately upon her brow and let her mouth droop like a tired angel's. Then she sighed.

"Well," he asked at last brusquely, "what about it, my dear?"

"But my dear Sir Harry, much as I adore you . . ."

"Look here, old girl . . ." He sounded furious for a second, and then changed his voice back to at least a shadow of its old jovial monotony. "Look, my dear Jennie, I have put fifteen hundred dollars every month into your account. I have paid all the bills for this little place of yours. Li has made a full accounting to me. I have paid Li. Through him I have paid your somewhat unusual confidante Liza. Furthermore, I have paid several times the amount I planned to your milliner and dressmakers and habitmakers, and God knows what I still owe to the Dublin saddler who made such a hit with the ladies two months ago.

"Furthermore, my dear," he added as he watched Jennie pull herself stiff in her skin, every bone as long with hauteur as a human bone could be, and her head perched like a female quail's upon its gleaming neck, "furthermore, I have not failed to give you all the respect, admiration, adulation—"

Suddenly his voice choked, and Jennie was astounded to see that he was laughing. She could not believe it for a moment. But there were his slate-blue eyes dancing at her. There was his toothy mouth stretched into a caricature of a stifled roar of mirth. She caught his look and forced him, as if she slashed a little whip across his red face, to *stop*.

"My dear," he said finally, "I do adore you. You are the damnedest little tart in all the West, and you damn well know it. And I believe that you are also the best paid."

Jennie turned away from him. She walked like a cat to the low table with the wine on it and poured two glasses full to the brim. Then she picked them up, and stepping back to where the old nobleman stood, she held one out to him and let her fingers rest

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with an insulting languor on his as he took it, and then lifted her own to her lips.

"May I drink to you with your wine?" she asked sweetly.

Harry looked at her and then said, "Now, I say, Jennie! It's your wine, this! You damn well know it is. And you've paid me for it as no other woman could. But the whole thing is, will you let me have some of your money, on tick as it were? I need it now. I need it tonight, or at the latest tomorrow night. In two more days you shall have it back. Give me a cheque for fifty thousand dollars. In two days you get back double. I'm not begging you for it, Jennie. I'm telling you that you must. Don't be a little God-damned fool now, at this point in your life."

Jennie looked at him leaning towards her, with the firelight kind to his craggy face. She smelled the fog on his clothes. She knew the aristocracy of his bones in their decaying flesh. She remembered the mockery and the live recognition of her as less than a princess in his slaty eyes, and his last burst of laughter, and without hesitation she said, "No."

Finally he asked, almost sadly, "Are you sure, my dear?"

Again without hesitation she said, "Yes, I am sure. I have no money that I can lend you."

Silently she sang a wild song of all the rich fools who would pay for her now, of all that she had done to sew them like sacrificial feathers into her protective queenly cloak, of all their stupidities that would make up to her in small measure for the ills the world had ever borne her, and the slights the world's people had ever heaped upon her . . .

"I have nothing at all for you, Harry."

He sighed as if he had known her answer. She expected him to ask her to say it again, but instead he bowed over her two little hands with a gentle kiss. Then he kissed her throat, her earlobes, and her nostrils.

"You know, if anyone does, my dear Jennie," he murmured politely, and the door closed, although that night they were supposed to see one of the numberless performances of *Camille*, and Jennie had laid out a costume that would have let few eyes rest upon the train-weary actress behind the footlights.

ABOUT ten o'clock Jennie, alarmed at last to be so alone in the little night-bound, fog-bound, snob-bound house, had Li go for dark Liza. Five minutes later he would have been gone himself, silently into the salt air, to meet his cousins or his smoke-filled friends. Five minutes before he was sitting with his hands folded over two white beans of jade on a checkered board.

When Jennie spoke to him, hating to do so because of her pride,

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but sure of her remote hold over him, he said, "Certainly, Miss Jennie. I shall go at once. I think this is the right time to speak with the Negress, as you suggest." He bowed, his eyes and hands invisible, and went towards the back door, like a tall pole, and Jennie realized with a feeling of faint hysteria that at last, this dreadful night, he had indeed spoken to her as she first knew he could, with scholarly preciseness.

Soon Liza in her white unwilted sunbonnet was there, standing with hands folded like Li's. "What is wrong, Jennie?" she asked in her strong voice, but with such an extra measure of sour hate and censure in it that Jennie hesitated.

"Liza," Jennie said at last, "Sir Harry came tonight and wanted me to give him money."

"And what did you do, Jennie?" Liza's voice was rich and trusting now, as if she recited a familiar litany. "What did you do, Jennie, my dear? Did you say yes to the old man?"

"Liza, I said no."

Jennie waited for what seemed a long time and finally heard the Negress's starched bonnet strings crackle against her old dry throat as she asked sternly, "And why did you say no, Jennie?"

The query seemed intolerable and insolent to the little exquisite woman in her silken nest, and suddenly, knowing at last that she was committed to a certain pattern of foolery, and hating the old witch who had helped her into it, she said in a sweet, weak way, "But Liza did not tell me! Liza was not here to help poor Jennie!"

Liza stood tall and stiff with scorn. "You have misused my powders," she said coldly. "You have gone against them. I made my powders for you because I thought you were right for them, and now you have done the wrong thing with them and crossed them, I tell you."

"But I did not! You're unfair to me!"

"You did, foolish, foolish fool, or you would never have said no to old Sir Harry! What made you think you needed all that money? Money must come steady to stay steady. With me it would have come steady and it would have stayed steady for us both. Would the old man not have doubled what you loaned him? Would he not, you—you—"

Liza raised her arms in a frightening, unfamiliar gesture high above her bonnet, and then, slowly, as if she cleared her spiritual throat of a kind of puce-grey miasma, she spat at Jennie's feet and left.

IN the morning the house was cold, and there was no delicate tea for Jennie upon a lacquered tray. But about eleven Li appeared, looking no more like a real human being than ever, with

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his bun of braided hair and his invisible eyes.

"Missie, pardon," he said. "Li get in accident last night."

There was no sign of bruise or cut or weariness on what showed of him above the dark blue house-coat, and Jennie reassured herself by imagining a night of smoke dreams for her prime minister.

"Sir Harry call," he said suddenly as he flicked one finger like a trout-fly into the gondola of warm water he prepared for Jennie, while she waited in a cloud of *mousseline* upon the bath rug.

Finally she replied, like a dutiful convent girl, "Yes? Sir Harry?"

Li put another handful of the Baden crystals into the tub. "He say five gentlemen come tonight for extra-fine dinner, honour of big race tomorrow with Tokay Jennie." There was no query in the thin voice, and as Jennie looked at him the Chinese sketched the shadow of the ghost of a shrug under his fine blank face.

The menu was a good one, as always. Jennie and Li decided that they would astonish San Francisco gastronomy by serving a croustade of little local oysters coated with *béchamel*, to be served instead of either her favourite salad or Sir Harry's Roman punch between the roast and the game. And there would be a creamy cheese beaten with Sauternes and made into a ring for hill strawberries. She would use several of the Keller wines, and then a high Sauterne with the dessert, to please her lord.

Jennie dressed lovingly, as always, but with her mind more than usual tonight upon immediate happenings. Why had Liza gone out so ungratefully, she asked herself. It was an ugly thing, to spit at her! What had Jennie done? Ah, poor Jennie, thus to be spat at! And Old Harry, to walk out as if he owed nothing to her! Had he forgotten that Jennie, little Jennie, was in the same rosy perfumed room with him? Was that not more important than some silly debts he owed?

She wore pearls upon emeralds and topazes piled on pearls that night, and her gown was a froth of crystal-heavy gauze, the colour of champagne, from which her little toes in tea-coloured slippers peeped out like sly mice. She wore crystals trembling everywhere in her curls, and upon her upper arms thin gloves of champagne kidskin moulded the soft physiognomy of her being, like a drawing of a goddess in the sky. She floated on a decorous fog of scent, and the rouge on her cheekbones was discreet. She was, to all intents at least, a lady.

And Harry was a gentleman, as he stood easy and gaily supercilious before the dining-room grate. Jennie saw with astonishment that he wore, instead of his braided theatre-coat, a soft velvet

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jacket he had never used before except when they planned a long, intimate evening beside her boudoir fire. It became him. She looked at it and smiled with a lift in her breast at its promise, until he said, watching her, "The gentlemen tonight are all friends of ours, my dear, and I have permitted myself the luxury of this lounging-habit."

"Friends?" She raised her eyebrows, and in spite of herself asked sharply, "Have we any friends? I thought you always went alone to the balls."

"To the balls, yes, my dear. But these are, as I said, our friends—shall I add, sporting, of the world sporting?"

Jennie stood graciously by the grate, drinking almost nothing from the glass of pink Plymouth gin and Italian wine that Harry had stirred for her. Her mind raced away from Liza and impenetrable Li to the men who might soon gleam gratefully at her table. Who in San Francisco could thus invited come upon Sir Harry in his house-coat? What trick was he playing?

She was amazed, and in an ominous way puzzled, when finally they appeared, a refutation of her opinion of her old Saxon lover and his blindness. There they were, gathered neatly into one tight cautious group; Marc Raphael, still bandaged from his wedding death-ride; James the shipper, with his eyes like nuggets of slate, colder than Sir Harry's; Coll Hemingway, gay and pressing even in the small room, with his urgent black-haired wrists and his mockery so like Harry's; and the last two, the limp-eyed Southerner Sanchez and Coll's unsuspecting partner.

Jennie looked at them all and sent out from herself a kind of self-protective mist of desire, to hide her perturbation at the strange turn of things. She felt impotent but innately optimistic, like a beast in a maze.

She sat at the head of the table and had one of Li's cousins hand the dishes first to her, as if to prove their dearth of active poison, before she let the gentlemen scoop into them. She tasted each wine with a small dip of the glass to meet the deep salutation of Sir Harry facing her along the board. She sped ahead of the guests into the warm, beautiful little drawing-room, so well lit by the Venetian wall-candles, to crouch in a kind of elegant cramp over the low coffee table and the row of jewelled cups.

"Coffee?" she asked softly. "Coffee, Sir Harry, Mr. James, dear Mr. Raphael? And you, Mr. Sanchez, and you, dear sir? And you, Mr. Hemingway?"

She looked for the first real time at any of them, and saw Coll standing like a fir tree in the light, and felt herself ready to faint with desire. A small Chinese with a bun of hair like Li's waited at her elbow, and she waved away the webby bottle he held towards

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Sir Harry, who stood ready, as always, to pour his Jennie's wine.

"Tokay," he cried out hoarsely, so like himself that none but she noticed his helpless theatrical croak. "Coll, old boy . . . Marc . . . taste this wine, I say!"

Jennie got up as decorously as she could and fled to the cool halls near her apartment. She still heard Harry's harsh voice, and saw against the soft light in the drawing-room the bones beneath the cloth, the marrow in the bones, of Raphael and James and the two others and . . . and Coll—Coll the one who had really tricked her, Coll the man here at the world's edge who had spoiled everything for her and made her forget even for one millionth of one second that she was Jennie. Indeed she hated him, as she stood there breathing in and out beside her doorway.

She listened. To the back of the house there was no sound: Li had gone already, perhaps, and without more than the one clear word to her, to let her know how much more perfectly than she he could speak any tongue in the world's books. She hated him for that, and for not letting her know him; she hated him for leaving her his debtor. And dark Liza was gone, richer by thousands of dollars, but with the unforgivable stain of spittle upon Jennie's spiritual shoes. Liza could not do that to Jennie . . . or should not think she could.

Jennie shook away the uncertainty of her anger and moved back towards the drawing-room. Inside she could hear the old fool Harry talking, in his mocking way. How could he ever know her hatred of him for that poised voice that was as much a part of him as his chin? How could he know the insult in his easy laughter, and the goad of his teasing certainty of her, her, Jennie? She, if she were not Jennie, could spit on him as surely as old Liza had ever done on her.

She shuddered and pushed open the door. "May I help you, my dear Sir Harry?" she asked gently, lightly.

He lifted his head from the tall glass he frowned upon and looked suddenly like a young man instead of an old tired one trying not to let his hand shake as he poured the wine.

"Ah, Jennie!" His voice was warmer than the Tokay.

It is too bad he is such a beast, Jennie thought. If only he had never laughed at me, I could love him.

"May I help you, my dear?" she asked again. She picked up the bottle and held it carefully, while her wide grey eyes slipped over the men watching her. There was an almost visible pause.

Then Harry said, "Go to the vestibule, my dear, will you, and bring us fresh cards? We have decided on a little match."

Jennie sped from the room and down the dark rich hallway,

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where there still hung a shadow of the brandy that had been poured flaming over hothouse fruit in the dining-room. The cards felt cool in her hands. She stood touching them gently to her cheeks, outside the drawing-room door.

"Of course, man! Of course I hate to get rid of her, especially at this point," she heard Sir Harry agree with one of his guests, his voice nonchalant and very British. "Little Tokay Jennie . . . finest filly I ever owned, and I've spent a lot of time and money on her."

"She shows it," Coll Hemingway said.

"From you, Coll, that's a fine compliment, old boy. I bow to you as an even better man than myself in such matters, in spite of your relatively tender age!"

There was a roar of laughter from the company. Then Harry went on, "It's hard to admit even this temporary setback. I needn't tell you that. But I've put too much into the stable, shall we say? It's costing me too much to keep my colours up in front, in spite of what all you gentlemen have contributed to Tokay Jennie's upkeep with your generous betting."

Jennie let her hands drop slowly to her sides, so that the cards fell down on to the thick carpet. She was frozen with shock. They were talking about her, about Jennie the princess, laughing and treating her like a horse, a low four-legged creature! Her heart pounded so that she could hardly hear the men in her drawing-room, but their gay, coarse voices finally rose above the red storm in her eyes.

"Where on God's earth did you find her, Harry?"

There was a little pause. Jennie could see the eager eyes watching, the vile mouths ready to shout more laughter, and she heard Harry pour another glass of wine. Then he said, his voice rising on the swallow, "It's hard to believe, old chaps, but I give my word—Virginia City!"

There was another many-throated roar from the men who, as tried Westerners, knew the look of the exhausted drabs from the mining town too well ever to see exquisite Jennie there. In the hall she raised her head proudly, grateful for their disbelief in spite of her fury.

"Yes," Harry went on, "I found her up there, working like a good little hustler, too, and it cost a fortune to buy her away from Old Bertha, I can tell you. She'd once been right here in the city, incidentally, but not in any place you gentlemen would have visited. I sent her to Chicago, took her in hand myself until I thought she was fit to wear my colours—you know the rest—and thanks to old Liza's little rigmarole about magic love potions and my good Li's expert chaperonage, I have been able to let each of you gentle-

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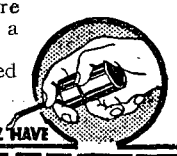

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men try out her paces for yourself."

The old man's voice was round with satisfaction. Jennie could see with her mind's eye the half-amused, half-angry looks of the five men who had with such wiliness been brought to share her. What fools they must feel, she cried out desperately, trying not to recognize their robust merriment, trying to tell herself that she had put horns on every one of them and that they hated one another for it.

"The trouble with Tokay Jennie," Harry went on comfortably in his deaf-sure voice, "is that she is so stupid. She forgot to remember that other people might be even less so. She takes herself too seriously, that is!"

It was then that Jennie killed him, in spite of herself. She murdered him in her mind as she stood there shaking in the dark hallway, as surely as if she had stabbed, poisoned, shot, slashed, bitten with acid, burned with oily fire, and as she saw his taunting body fall, bleed, flame, disintegrate before her, she turned slowly from the closed door towards her apartment.

"Fifty thousand is stiff, I know," he was saying, "but you all agree that she's worth it. At least, thanks to me, the man who wins will never need buy her the etiquette books!"

Coll Hemingway laughed loudest and said, "Tokay Jennie looks more like a lady than anyone in San Francisco, by God."

"And now let's cut for it, gentlemen, as soon as the cards are here. Low card wins."

Jennie was in her room, peeling her clothes from her like old skins, throwing them everywhere on to the leopard-skin rugs and the rosy little chairs and tuffets. Naked, she looked with cold regret at her cases filled with carved jade. Half-corseted, she turned over the piles of jewels on her dressing table with an icy finger, past caring that she must desert them. Clothed in black, with the little snakeskin slippers rattling invisibly under her skirts, she picked up her cheque book, looked once at its pleasant round figures, and without another glance left the room where she had been so generous to the swine who betrayed her by laughing and making light of her together.

She despised them as only an outraged queen could do, and as she swept lightly down the thick stair carpet, the pain and fury she had let herself feel a few minutes before dissolved into a kind of peace. She was fleeing, yes, but she was once more the real Jennie, untainted by men's greed, unsoiled by their trickery. No more need she smile and feel herself drowning in their words, their dark ingratitude.

Jennie was free again . . .

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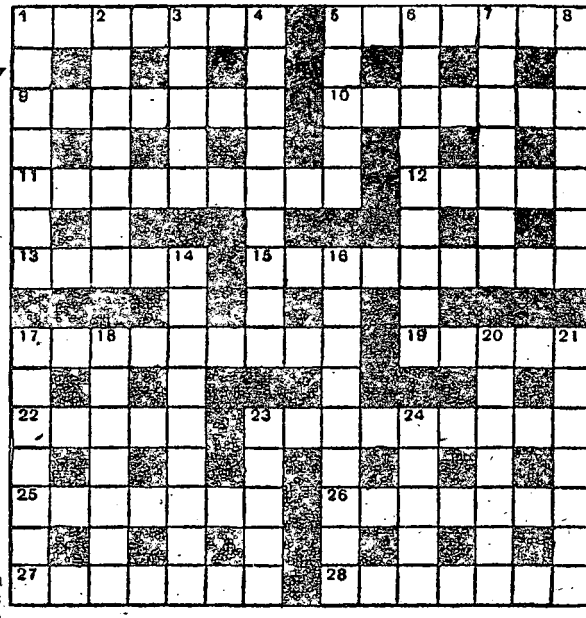
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 103



CLUES

Across

1 Dish with a three-quarters rice content in very warm outside (7).

5 Really rustic (7).

9 You will still see our army in the arsenal (7).

10 Not always a help in the works (7).

11 The young man who passes through it has a star reward (9).

12 A goddess of Spring or a prisoner in the Tower (5).

13 The crops give way (5).

15 This often has a bark inside it (two words 3, 6).

17 Is this headland transparent? (9).

19 A fictitious children's relation (5).

22 This kind of shale might give a strong lead (5).

23 The friendly way they have on ships (9).

25 The beginning of a disease weighs very light to make a wisecrack (7).

26 This support may only be temporary (7).

27 Sunburnt chap that never penetrates the best circles (7).

28 Train outwardly to regret (7).

Down

1 Use your ears to catch this rumour (7).

2 "Confound ——! . . . And all unseen —— brought up the nine-fifteen" (Kipling) (7).

3 It is apt to tempt people into lying (5).

4 A tidy berg would make, not destroy, this structure (two words 3, 6).

5 By perils perhaps, or by "some darling sin"?

6 A driver who changes his nationality may change his profession (9).

7 He spoke of malice toward none and charity for all (7).

8 Shorten to make an end to an ill-tempered dog (7).

14 Not necessarily Anna Sewell's heroine (two words 4, 5).

16 If there's nothing in the gas meter then you can get nothing from this obviously (9).

17 He who is this knows all the answers (7).

18 Beheading one of the family gives great joy (7).

20 One mist only might dampen the ground (7).

21 A little of fussiness at the start of a ceremony (7).

23 As a child I lay in bed to see this heavenly body (5).

24 Get the whole thing taped to become skilful (5).

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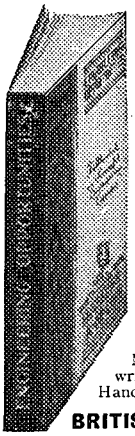

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Student No. 187/4/3

"I am sure that you will be gratified to hear that the article submitted for my second Lesson was published by the DAILY MIRROR and I received Six Guineas for it." Student No. 681/32/6

"I started right from scratch. By the time Lesson Five was completed, two of my stories had been sold to well-known periodicals. Another three were sold by the time Lesson Eight had been reached, and a further three shortly after that." Student No. 211/24/3

THE FLEET STREET SCHOOL
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